



How Do Students Make Decisions About Overseas Higher Education?

A Case Study of Chinese International Students

at a Regional Australian University

by

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Declaration of Originality

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Statement of Ethical Conduct

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

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List of Publications During This Ph.D. Research Project

The following publications are associated with this Ph.D. research project based on data collected from the study or literature reviewed relating to the research topic. I am the principal author of all these publications.

- Wu, Q., & Kember, D. (2018).** How do students make decisions about overseas higher education? A case study of Chinese international students at a regional Australian university. In D. Kember & M. Corbett (Eds.), *Structuring the thesis: Matching method, paradigm, theories and findings* (pp. 65-76). Singapore: Springer.
- Wu, Q., & Myhill, M. (2017).** Going off the beaten track: Exploring Chinese international students' motivations in selecting a regional Australian university. *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, 23(1), 96-119. Retrieved from <http://anzrsai.org/assets/Uploads/PublicationChapter/AJRS-23.1-pages-096-to-119.pdf>
- Wu, Q., & Myhill, M. (2016).** Going off the beaten track: Exploring Chinese international students' motivations for selecting regional Australian higher education. *Refereed Proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference of the Australia and New Zealand Regional Science Association International (ANZRS AI)*, 165-182. Retrieved from <http://www.anzrsai.org/assets/Conferences/ANZRS AI-2016-Conference-Proceedings.pdf>
- Wu, Q. (2015).** A theoretical framework for understanding Chinese international students' decision-making in selecting regional Australian higher education. *Refereed Proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference 2015*, 1-15. Retrieved from http://www.aare.edu.au/data/2015_Conference/Full_papers/302_Qian_Wu.pdf

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Abstract

This research was triggered by my personal experience of choosing to undertake a doctoral course abroad. Another motivation of selecting this topic was from my observations, that is, in recent years a growing number of Chinese international students have “gone off the beaten track” to receive higher education in regional Australia. The research examined how students make decisions about overseas higher education by investigating Chinese international students at the University of Tasmania (UTAS), a regional Australian university.

The reviewed literature suggested that international students’ decision making for higher education abroad encompasses three major constructs: choices, factors and processes, which work together simultaneously. The interactions and the relationships among these three elements constitute international students’ decision-making models (see Figure 1).

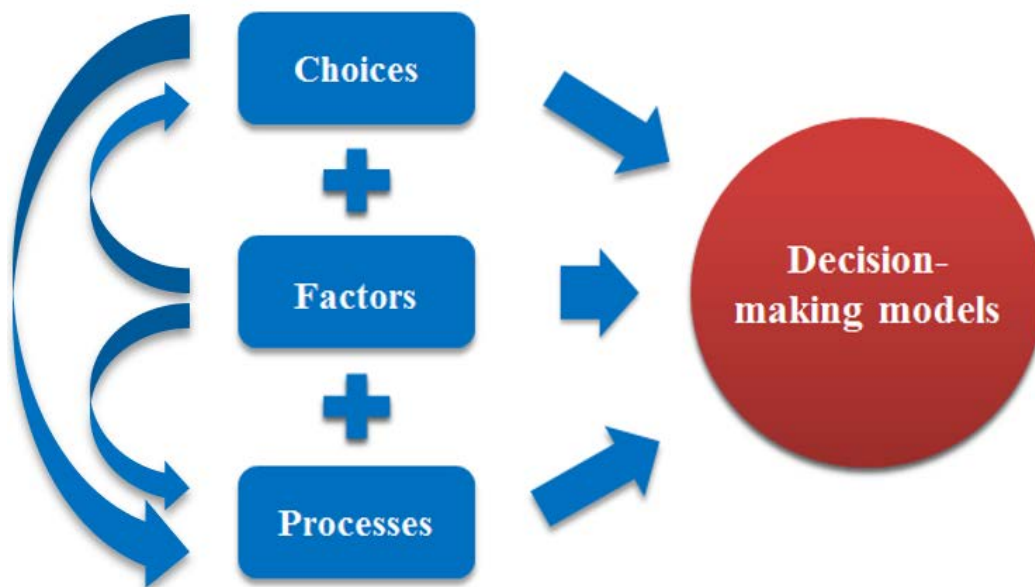


Figure 1. The relational framework of relevant constructs.

To integrate these constructs and to include ideas from relevant studies, a literature-derived framework for making choices (see Figure 2) was developed in order to holistically and systematically interpret international students’ decisions. Six major choices and a tentatively logical (top-down) hierarchy of these choices are embodied in this framework.

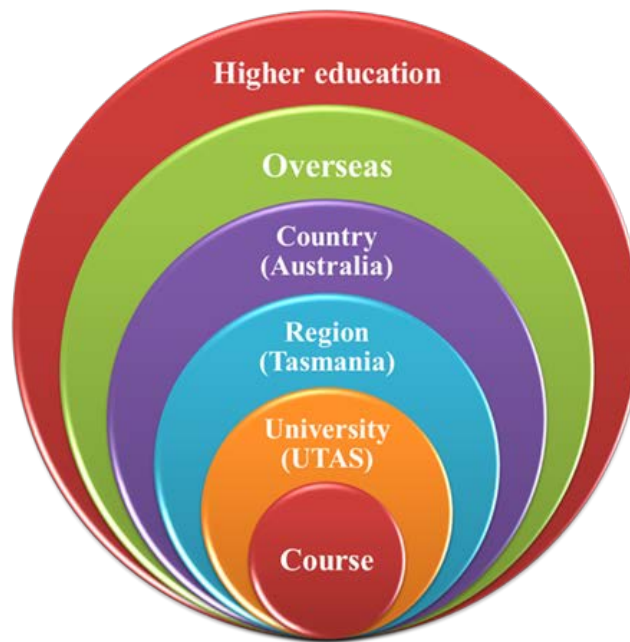


Figure 2. A literature-derived framework for making choices.

Guided by the literature-derived framework for making choices and the relational framework of relevant constructs, the study focuses on the major research objective to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university. This objective was explored through research questions:

- What are the factors and decision-making processes influencing the choices of Chinese international students to enrol in a regional Australian university?
- Can the choices, factors and processes be used to derive decision-making models relevant to the Chinese international students?
- Is it possible to derive more general decision-making models for overseas study?

The methodological principles underpinning this study were located within a convergent mixed methods research approach. This research involved two phases of data collection and analysis. In phase one, 459 (valid) online and paper questionnaires were gathered from Chinese international students studying at the UTAS Tasmanian campuses. Also, there were face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 23 graduating UTAS Chinese international students. There was a second phase of data collection in which 21 of the first-phase interviewees were followed up through phone or online calls. The purpose of the follow-up contact was to ask the students to evaluate their UTAS experience to ensure that the original decision making had led to reasonable conclusions. Systematic grounded theory was the underlying method guiding the qualitative data analysis and the entire study. Theories were inductively formulated by merging and generalising the results.

The consistent results drawing from both interview data and survey data reinforced the assertion that the overall decision of (Chinese) international students to engage in overseas

(UTAS) higher education consisted of six individual choices: (1) to receive higher education, (2) to study overseas, (3) to pick the host country (Australia), (4) to choose the region (Tasmania), (5) to pick the host university (UTAS), and (6) to select the course.

The initial results including choices, factors, processes and decision-making models came from a case study of Chinese international students at UTAS. The results of the case study were then generalised to a more global context of international students from different countries who are seeking overseas higher education.

The six choices were incorporated into a representation of the decision-making process (see Figure 3). The degree of influence of each of the choices varied between students, so each choice is shown as a spectrum between “very important” and “very unimportant”. Each individual had a position on each spectrum reflecting the importance of choice in their decision-making process. The six choices were shown as interlinked as there were influences from one choice to another in the decision-making process. The interlinking in the representation also acknowledged the finding that the choice sequence varied between students in their decision-making process.

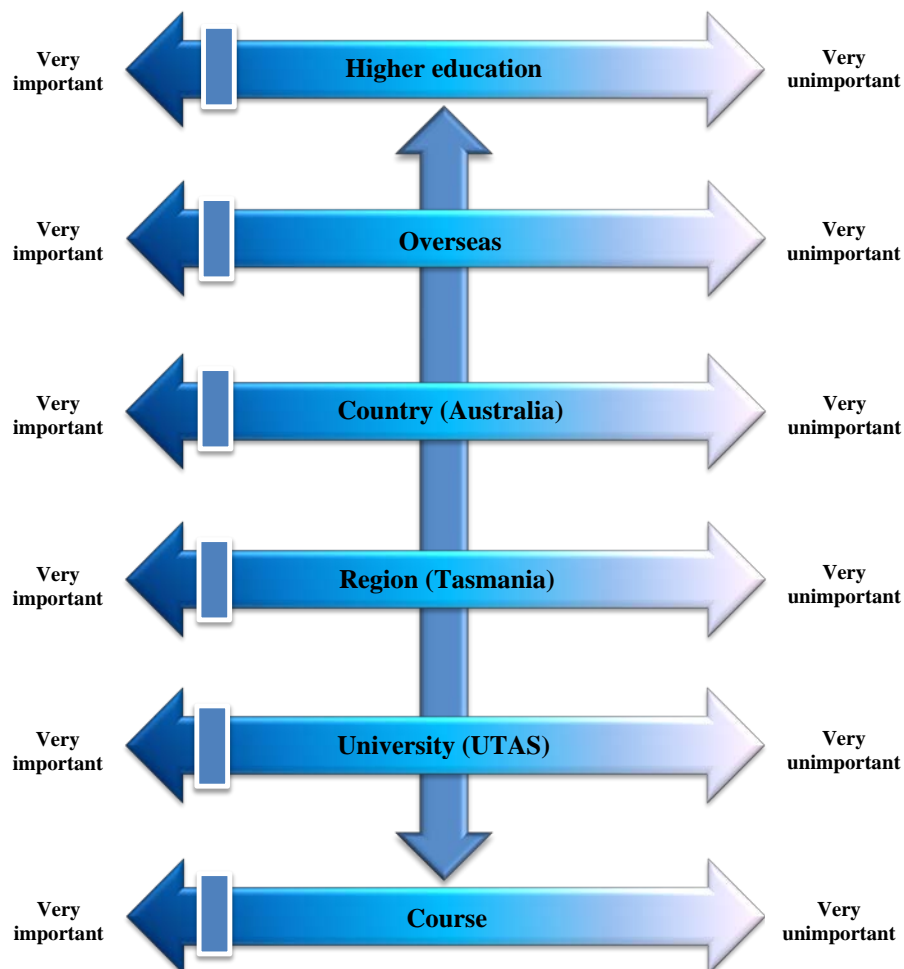


Figure 3. The choice-strength framework for (Chinese) international students making decisions about overseas (UTAS) higher education.

Three decision-making models integrating choices, factors and processes of (Chinese) international students emerged from this research, labelled according to the motivational orientations. The first one was the qualification-oriented decision-making model, which could be divided into the joint education program model and the non-joint education program model. The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs) started with the choice to receive higher education since a qualification was their primary goal. They then sought higher education abroad. Sequentially, they chose the country (Australia), university (UTAS) and a course in that order. The joint education program in which they had enrolled limited all these three choices. The choice of region (Tasmania) was shaped by the location of this particular overseas university (UTAS). In terms of the qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs), (Chinese) international students were keen to gain a qualification and therefore sought higher education as their first choice. They then chose to travel overseas for that education due to a lack of access to higher education in their home country. The subsequent choice for bachelor's degree seekers was the specific country (Australia), which was made by their parents. The students then chose a particular course on the basis of their own interests. The fifth choice for them was then for a specific university (UTAS) based on reasons such as the arrival of a quick and an easy offer, a higher quality-cost ratio, and acceptance of credit transfer. The particular region (Tasmania) was the last choice. A conducive study environment in the region (Tasmania) where the university (UTAS) is located would propel them onto accepting the university offer.

The second decision-making model was career-oriented. It started with the choice to receive a higher education. For students who want to be promoted in the same career field, a tertiary qualification was a requirement. For the group who hoped to transit into a new career field, higher education could speed up that transition. For students who had a qualification, but could not find a satisfying job, upgrading their education was seen as a way to improve employment opportunities in the future. The next choice was for a specific academic course. Studying in their job-related field could help improve their employment prospects in that area. The ease of admission and graduation was a key principle that could help them select a particular course in their expected domain. They were pushed to study abroad by limited choices of specialist courses or difficulty in gaining access to a high-quality higher education in their home country. Also, a belief that better work opportunities could be theirs if they had an overseas university qualification. Their fourth choice was for a country (Australia). Those who took specialist courses were limited by their availability. International students who hoped to enrol in non-specialist courses were enticed by the accessibility of higher education in a particular host country (Australia). A specific university (UTAS) was then selected. For those who had already selected a specialist course, they only had to choose a university (UTAS) which offered that course. For those taking a non-specialist course, a higher quality-cost ratio, and a quicker and easier offer were the two key attractions that guided their choice. The particular context (Tasmania) of the study was limited for them to the location of their chosen university (UTAS).

The last model was the immigration-oriented decision-making model. In this model the (Chinese) international students initially chose to travel overseas. Migration to another country

was motivated by employment prospects. They looked for a particular country (Australia) with high immigration possibilities by comparing the migration policies of diverse countries. Social links in that country (Australia) could also lure them to it. After deciding on their country of choice (Australia), receiving higher education in the host country (Australia) was always the easiest and most useful way to seek immigration to this country (Australia). Their next decision was about courses, which boosted their prospects of immigration. They then selected a specific region in that country (Tasmania) as a study destination, which could bring them regional immigration advantages. Finally, a particular university (UTAS) was then selected.

The findings in this research contribute to new and in-depth knowledge about international students' decision making at two levels. At the theoretical level, this research made a comprehensive and systematic presentation on factors influencing international students to undertake overseas higher education based on six choice themes. International student decision-making processes were identified on the basis of the choice-strength framework. This research constructed three international student decision-making models through the integration of choices, factors and processes. At the practical level, this study could be potentially useful to help stakeholders of international higher education (such as frontline international student recruiters, international marketing managers, international education agents, international higher education providers and government policy makers) develop a better understanding of the international higher education market.

The identification of choices, the representation of factors and the decision-making processes, as well as the decision-making models were developed from a case study of Chinese international students choosing to study at a regional Australian university. Through a process of generalisation, choices from the literature-derived framework, the representation of factors, and the decision-making processes, as well as the specific student decision-making models can be applied to the decision making of international students in other contexts. The representations and models will still be applicable in the future when factors such as economic growth and the development of university systems affect patterns of international student movement from particular regions. The generalised choices, the representation of factors and the decision-making processes, as well as the decision-making models will be able to accommodate to changing circumstances and incorporate new influences.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Jusheng Wu, and Ying Hu. My decision to study overseas was significant for them, as they say I am the meaning of their life. They have made it possible for me to take on this enterprise abroad to achieve my long-held dream. Although overseas, they have been my unwavering companions all the way along this journey. They have always been there to support me and share in my happiness, and to encourage me to overcome all difficulties. I could never have made it without their unfailing love and wholehearted support. I offer my deepest love and thanks to them.

This thesis is also dedicated to my grandfather, Fengyi Wu (1930-2018). He was my inspiration to pursue a doctoral degree, but he was unable to see my graduation. This is for him.

Acknowledgments

Undertaking this research overseas in Australia has been brought me through some of the most challenging but also rewarding periods of my life. As an international student in Tasmania, the entire Ph.D. process has not only brought me extensive academic knowledge and skills, but also has contributed to growth in body and soul.

This overseas Ph.D. journey has extended far beyond my efforts alone. Many people have been instrumental in guiding me throughout it. I would like to acknowledge those who have helped and supported me along the way. Without their assistance, the completion of this research would not have become a reality.

My deepest thanks go to my supervisors Professor David Kember and Associate Professor Marion Myhill for your tireless guidance, inspiration and encouragement during my Ph.D. candidature. With great patience and generosity, you have held my hands and helped me continue through this research journey step by step. Your unswerving commitment has brought out the best in me.

I am sincerely thankful for the Chinese international students at the University of Tasmania who took part in my research and shared their experiences with me. Your participation laid the critical foundation for this study. More importantly, the findings of this research are about you and belong to you. Any attempt that I make to show my real appreciation for your provision of valuable information for this research project will be inadequate, but all the same, I truly thank you all.

My fellow Ph.D. candidates, academics and staff at the University of Tasmania, particularly those in the Faculty of Education have been outstanding. Thank you so much for generously offering your intellectual insight and time throughout my research. I have learned a great deal from you. Also, your constant support for my life is unforgettable. The experience you have given me will be a deeply meaningful memory for my entire life.

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Glossary of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Government
AMC	Australian Maritime College
ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities
AU\$	Australian dollar
CHC	Confucian heritage culture
CPA	Certified Practising Accountants
DET	Department of Education and Training, Australian Government
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Australian Government
EBM model	Engel-Blackwell-Miniard model
EKB model	Engel-Kollat-Blackwell model
EU	European Union
Go8	Group of Eight
GRE	Graduate Record Examinations
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IMAS	Institute for Marine & Antarctic Studies
ISB	International Student Barometer
ISS	International Student Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
PR	Permanent Residency/Residence/Resident
RUN	Regional Universities Network
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SET	Faculty of Science, Engineering & Technology
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TSBE	Tasmanian School of Business & Economics
UTAS	University of Tasmania

PART A: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis reports how students make decisions to enrol in higher education overseas. This chapter describes the initial inspiration of this research, my personal experience of overseas study. An overview of the contextual background of the study is then outlined, specifically the importance of international tertiary students within the global context, as well as within Australia, and also within the context of regional Australia. The focus is on Chinese international students¹ in overseas higher education. The chapter also introduces the research aims and objectives, and the key research questions. It ends with a definition of the key terms used in this thesis.

1.2 A Personal Account

Before I came to Australia to undertake this Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program, I was conducting my research in China focused on comparative higher education. I was restricted to using second-hand resources, such as literature translated from English to Chinese. The author's real purpose can often be misunderstood when it has been translated. Many of the founders of higher education theories are based outside China, and so I came to the realisation that I needed to go overseas to gain first-hand knowledge of this field. I also thought that undertaking a doctoral course in an overseas university would be a great way to immerse myself in a higher education system outside China, to give me a more comprehensive understanding. During my master's degree in China, my experience of a summer study tour to a number of American prestigious universities confirmed my decision to study overseas.

It was then that I realised very few Education students in China intend to study overseas. This is quite different from the situation for Science students. Consequently, I could only gain a limited amount of information from my seniors in education about overseas study choices. Without many social links overseas, I became keen to collect more information about my options from various sources, such as professional consultations with education agents, online forums, and university websites. Through my search for information, I also discovered a curious phenomenon that most Chinese students who intend to study overseas prefer to enrol in metropolitan universities.

These two reasons, one personal and one systemic, triggered my initial interest to study what motivates students to go overseas higher education, and how exactly they go about making their decisions.

¹ Section 1.5.1 will define the term Chinese international students for this research.

Eventually I enrolled at the University of Tasmania (UTAS), a regional Australian university.¹ I tried to understand my own decision making in choosing this regional Australian higher education institution. I noticed then that enrolment numbers of Chinese international students at UTAS have been increasing steadily in recent years, even though it is a regional university. This led me to another phenomenon, which is the growing number of Chinese international students who are choosing actively and deliberately to undertake higher education courses in regional Australia² rather than following the majority of their compatriots and enrolling in metropolitan Australian universities.

Reviewing the literature was the main task at the beginning of the Ph.D. journey, and it was then that I found that these two emerging phenomena were not covered well in the existing literature. Most of the research had failed to explain the relationship between the influencing factors and the choices made in the international students' decisions, and did not describe their decision-making processes fully. There was little discussion about students' decision-making models.

There is a significant body of literature concentrating on the push-pull theory developed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) in order to explain the factors that contribute to international students' decisions, especially to study in metropolitan universities (e.g. Azmat et al., 2013; Bohman, 2009; Cummings, 1984; Duan, 1997; Li & Bray, 2007; Pimpa, 2002; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). The factors that influence the decisions made by a new generation of Chinese international students are unknown, and much less attention has been paid to those in regional universities, where the contexts differ greatly from those of larger cities. The above factors inspired and motivated me to conduct this research.

1.3 Research Background

1.3.1 The Global Context of International Higher Education and Chinese International Students

Currently, in the context of global knowledge economics, "higher education is more open than at any time in history" (Marginson, 2011, p. 8). In other words, today's higher education is borderless, and globalisation and internationalisation are increasing at an unprecedented rate. According to the latest *Education at a Glance* from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017), the number of foreign tertiary students has risen astronomically within a generation, from 0.8 million in the late 1970s to 4.6 million in 2015; an almost six-fold increase. In this way, international higher education has become a major industry around the world.

¹ The term "regional Australian university" in this study will be defined in section 1.5.3.

² The definition of "regional Australia" for the purpose of this research can be seen in section 1.5.2.

In this worldwide industry, pools and flows of international students who are enrolled at the tertiary level tend to remain concentrated. According to the latest statistics from the OECD's Education at a Glance 2017 (2017), shown in Figure 1.1, advanced English-speaking countries have the largest numbers of international students engaged in higher education programs: that is, the U.S.A. (20%), the U.K. (9%) and Australia (6%). The top five destination countries accounted for 44% of total international students in overseas higher education in 2015 (OECD, 2017). It is clear, therefore, that Australia is an active key player, ranked at No.3 in 2015. So it is imperative to examine what has caused Australia to win this position in the international higher education market.

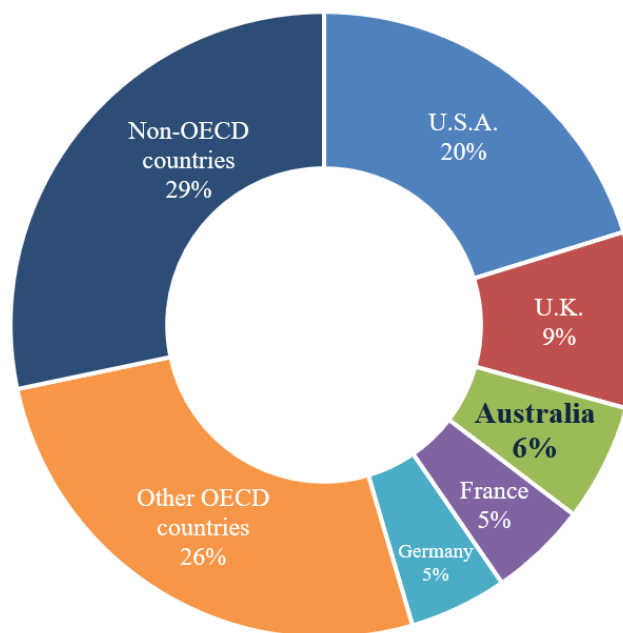


Figure 1.1. Distribution of international students in higher education by country of destination, 2015 (OECD, 2017).

Students from Asia (32%) have now formed the largest regional group of international higher education enrolments, followed by those from Europe (16%) and the Americas (6%) (Department of Education and Training, the Australian Government [DET], 2017i). The top six countries sending internationally mobile tertiary students are China (20%), India (7%), Germany (4%), Korea, France and Saudi Arabia (each ranging between 2-3%) (OECD, 2017).

The value of international tertiary students for host and home countries, as well as for the world as a whole, is therefore tremendous. In the short term, the destination countries are stimulated by profit to be involved in international higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007; OECD, 2017). Incoming students in higher education provide high tuition fees and pay for their living expenses. In the long-run, highly educated mobile talents also contribute to the labour markets of their host countries in the spheres of knowledge creation, innovation and economic performance (OECD, 2017).

Mobile tertiary students also make significant contributions to the global knowledge economy. For home countries, those who return to their home countries after studying abroad or maintain strong linkages with the country of origin make contributions to knowledge absorption, technology upgrading and capacity building (OECD, 2017). Recent research (Appelt, van Beuzekom, Galindo-Rueda, & de Pinho, 2015) has revealed that a good predictor of future research scientists in a country is students who have studied abroad and returned to their home countries; this has an important “brain circulation” effect. International tertiary students who migrate to the study destination countries after graduation might be seen as talent lost from their home countries, but their geographical mobility and information sharing can shape international cooperation networks across the globalised world.

China is experiencing a surge of students heading overseas for study. The latest data on the population of Chinese students studying abroad, covering 1950 to 2016, have been released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2017), and the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (2017) (see Figure 1.2). It can be seen from this figure that 1978 was a turning point for numbers of Chinese students studying abroad, growth kept in pace with the *Reform and Opening-Up* (改革开放, gǎi gé kāi fàng) of China, and students were encouraged to study abroad by the Chinese government from that time on.

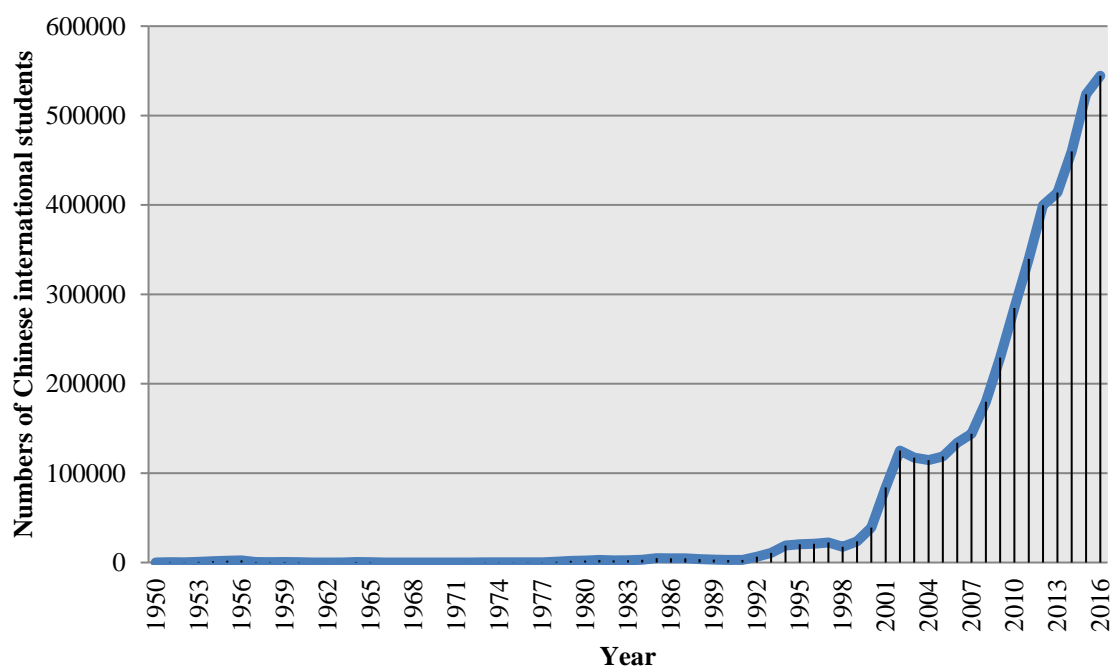


Figure 1.2. Numbers of Chinese students studying abroad from 1950 to 2016 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2017).

Figure 1.2 shows that, until the 1990s however, there was only a very small number of Chinese students who could study abroad. Since that time, the increase has been sharp. In that period the number of self-funded students has grown dramatically (Beijing University School of Education & Zhongshan University Institute of Higher Education, 2005). The number has

increased even more rapidly since 2005, and in 2016, it hit an all-time high of 544,500 students. The majority of participants in this research had left China and started tertiary study during or after 2010 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2017).

Chinese international students form the largest tertiary cohort in the world, so it is necessary to describe the historical and social contexts that have led them to choose higher education overseas. The shifting social, political, economic, and cultural environment in China has had a significant impact on their motivations to study higher education. This is particularly so for the generation that was the focus of this study.

China's social environment has changed since 1999, when the government established a goal to reach 15% higher education enrolment by 2010 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 1998). Since then, Chinese higher education has expanded dramatically. China adopted the definition of "mass higher education" from Martin Trow: "when over 15% of the age grade have access to higher education" (1973, p. 63). By 2015, the gross enrolment ratio of higher education in China had reached 40% (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2017). Now, the latest goal of the Chinese government is to achieve 50% by 2020. This goal appears in the *Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China* (2017); this is "universal higher education" in Trow's terms (2007). 97.8% of the survey respondents and all interviewees in this research were born in the 1980s and 1990s. This generation has seen this transition of Chinese higher education from an elite to a mass phenomenon, and now to be a universal goal. More importantly, their decisions about higher education may be influenced greatly by this expansion of Chinese higher education.

The political environment, particularly the policy of family planning, has had a strong impact on this generation of Chinese people as well. The *One-Child Policy* was implemented in mainland China in 1979 and was ended formally in 2015. The participants in this research belonged to the only generation who experienced this policy in China's history. As the only children in their families, their motivations to receive higher education may be different from those of other Chinese students who are older and have experienced big families.

When it comes to the changing economic environment, China has also experienced great reforms arising from the move to a market economy from a planned one. Its economic growth has been incredibly rapid in the past 40 years. The cohort of Chinese people who have grown up in this special economic environment have more resources and more choices available to them, which is entirely different from previous times. This has had a great influence on them, and on the kinds of factors that motivate them to progress onto higher education.

Given the cultural environment, China is now affected greatly by Western culture and its values, as a consequence of its opening doors policies. There is a need to examine whether Chinese culture and traditions such as Confucianism still influence this generation's decision making. This research was a good starting point to find out the extent to which Chinese students make

their own choices to engage in higher education, and to what extent their parents decide for them, as in times past.

1.3.2 International Tertiary Students in Australia

In Australia, international education particularly at higher education level, plays a direct role in the domestic economy. The influence extends to other areas, such as tourism, workforce capability, and communities. International education remained the third largest export sector for Australia in 2015 and 2016, only after iron ore and coal, and this was achieved mainly through onshore international students (DET, 2016c; 2017f).

The contribution of international education to the Australian economy is still growing. International education generated AU\$19.4 billion in export income in 2015, and in 2016 this increased to AU\$22.4 billion (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017). The higher education sector has also had the largest share of the international education market in Australia at 68.9%, and AU\$15.1 billion in 2016 (ABS, 2017).

In 2016, most international students in Australia (43%) were studying in the higher education sector (DET, 2017d). In fact, Deloitte Access Economics (2015) reported that the value of international education exports is not only limited to the figures captured in the ABS statistics, but it actually contains more avenues for revenue. For example, friends and relatives visiting international students in Australia were estimated to have contributed AU\$282 million in 2014-2015 (Deloitte Access Economics & DET, 2015).

In addition to this, 130,000 skilled immigrants from Australia's current international students are expected to contribute to the national workforce after graduation (Deloitte Access Economics & DET, 2015). This will lead to further economic benefits, from increased entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange, international collaboration, trade and investment links and soft diplomacy, as well as social benefits stemming from improved cultural literacy, stronger cultural linkages and enhanced cultural capital (Deloitte Access Economics & DET, 2015).

Chinese international students show a strong preference for Australia as their higher education destination. The latest report of the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) has revealed that, in 2014, Australia was the second largest higher education destination for outbound Chinese students (14.2%) behind the U.S.A. (41.0%) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018) (see Figure 1.3).

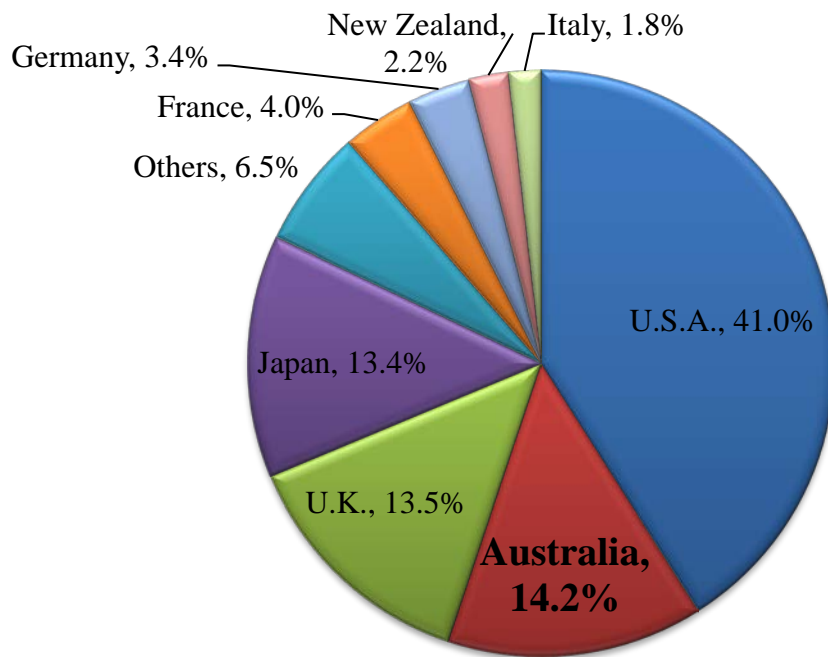


Figure 1.3. Top higher education destination countries for Chinese students, 2014 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018).

In this way, Chinese international students are prominent among international students in Australia, particularly in higher education. According to international student data from 2002 to 2017, they were the largest group of all international students in Australia (DET, 2017e). In 2016 for example, they comprised 27.5% of all international student enrolments in all sectors (DET, 2017a). Furthermore, there has been a steady increase in the popularity of Australia as a study destination for students from China. Since 2002, the number of Chinese international students pursuing education in Australia has been growing at an average annual rate of 11% per year (DET, 2016b). At the same time, Chinese international students also remain the largest cohort of international students in Australian higher education, which is far ahead of other countries. In 2016, China accounted for 36.8% of enrolments in Australian international higher education, whereas the second largest share nationality, India, was only at 14.6% (DET, 2017a). The majority of Chinese international students in Australia are those in higher education rather than in other education sectors, and in 2016, that rate was 67% (DET, 2017b).

For all of the above reasons it seemed highly worthwhile to find out more about why Australia is so attractive to Chinese tertiary students.

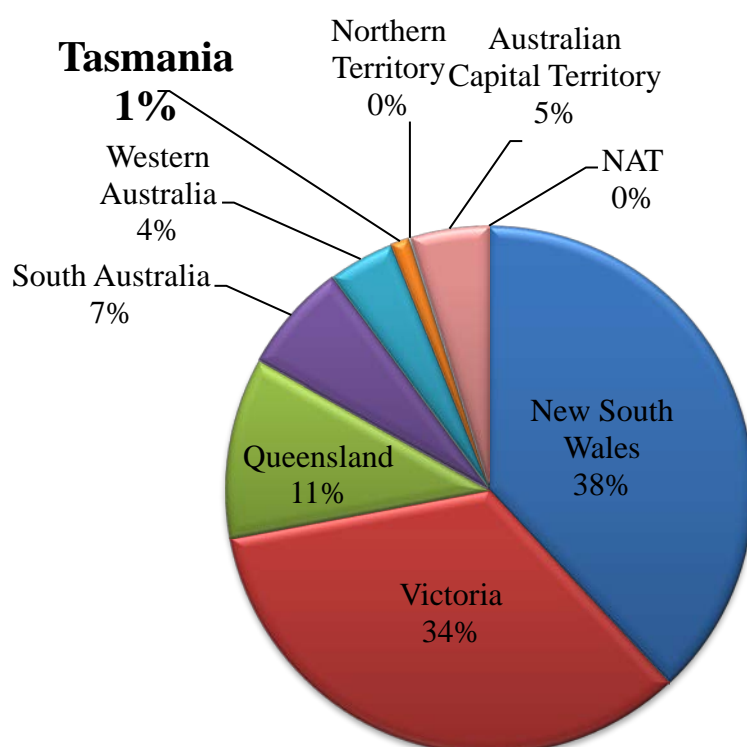
1.3.3 Chinese International Students in Regional Australian Higher Education

Most international students choose to engage in education in metropolises (Deloitte Access

Economics & DET, 2015). In 2016, regional Australia¹ only attracted 9% of all onshore international student enrolments in Australian institutions (DET, 2017h). However, international students in regional Australia were most likely to be there for the purpose of higher education courses (47% in 2016) (DET, 2017h).

This pattern has been the same for students from China. The majority tend to go to Australian metropolitan centres, such as Melbourne and Sydney (Deloitte Access Economics & DET, 2015). In fact, the latest statistics from the DET (2016e) revealed that, in 2015, approximately only 5% of total enrolments of Chinese international students were in regional Australian areas.²

Instead of following this tendency to prefer metropolises, a very few Chinese international students have gone off the beaten track, to enrol in higher education in Tasmania, a regional state. According to recent data (DET, 2016f), only 1% of all Chinese tertiary student enrolments in 2016, were in Tasmania (see Figure 1.4). However, recently increasing numbers of Chinese international students have come to Tasmania for higher education. It will be worthwhile to investigate the motivations underlying this new.



¹ “Regional Australia” here was defined by DET in 2017. “The Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), which is also used for the national census categorised the whole of Tasmania and the Northern Territory as regional areas. For the purpose of this Research Snapshot, the whole of the ACT is defined as not regional” (DET, 2017h).

² “Regional Australia” here refers to non-capital areas of Australia. Capital Australian areas include all state and territory capital cities and the Gold Coast (DET, 2016e). DET defined the term of regional Australia in 2016.

Figure 1.4. Proportions of Chinese international students enrolling in Australian higher education by state/territory in 2016 (DET, 2016f).¹

From the perspective of the Australian government, the rise in Chinese international students selecting Tasmania as their study location is driven by relevant policies implemented by both the Australian federal government and the Tasmanian government. These are based on their awareness of the many benefits, especially in the economic, social and cultural areas, that Chinese international students can bring to Tasmania.

In 2012, the Australian Government released a White Paper titled *Australia in the Asian Century*, which specifically highlighted the opportunities which Chinese international students bring to Australian international higher education. The Tasmanian Government then commissioned its own White Paper in 2013, called *Tasmania's Place in the Asian Century*. In this document, policies relating to international education and the Chinese international student market were seen as key sectors for development. It highlighted the fact that China is the top Asian country for international students in Tasmania, and revealed that the government believes international education will become increasingly significant for Tasmania into the future (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2013).

After the historic visit of the Chinese President Xi Jinping to Tasmania on November 18, 2014, the relationship between Tasmania and China has become even stronger, and the Tasmanian Government has gone on to establish a strong and recognised brand, “Study Tasmania” to promote international education in the state (Department of State Growth, 2016).

UTAS is the only university based in Tasmania, and its main campuses are all located in that state. In spite of being a regional Australian university, it has an international vision. In 2010, it set six international goals, one of which was attracting “students from around the world through onshore and Transnational Education programs” (UTAS, 2011, p. 2). Clearly UTAS is aware of the benefits, especially financial, that international students can bring it. For example, its latest annual report (UTAS, 2016) reported that 14% of consolidated income in 2015 was from fees and charges, of which more than 96.7% was from fee-paying international students.

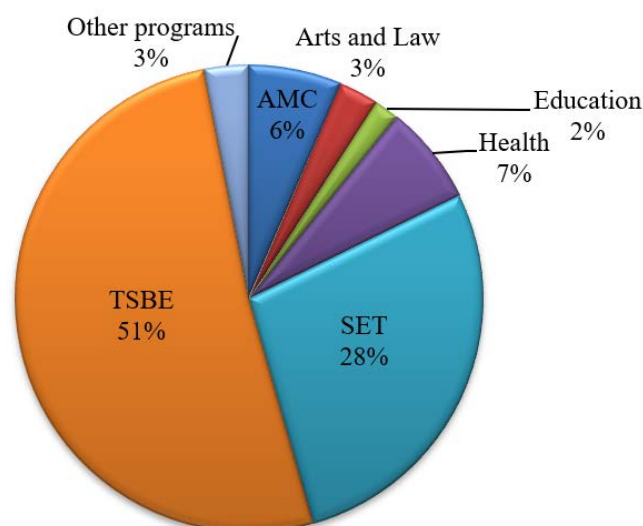
According to data from 2009 to 2016 however, international students still comprise a relatively small proportion of the student body at UTAS than they do in other Australian universities, ranging between 11% and 15% (DET, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016d, 2017g). The latest data about onshore international higher education students in 2016, for example, showed that the international proportion in UTAS was only 12.3%, and it was ranked No.34 of the 41 Australian universities. In contrast, the corresponding proportions at the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney were 33.7% and 31.2% respectively (DET, 2017g).

¹ NAT is a category capturing data from higher education with a single national registration that deliver courses to international students across different states and territories (DET, 2017).

The first Chinese international students studied at UTAS in 1979, and since then China and UTAS have had a long and positive relationship (UTAS, 2017). Under the impetus of relevant policies and initiatives, a growing number of education collaborations, such as teaching and research partnerships, have been built between UTAS and Chinese universities, so even more Chinese students are coming to UTAS through partner universities in China or scholarship schemes (UTAS, 2015).

This stronger relationship is reflected in the increase of Chinese international student enrolment numbers at UTAS:¹ 1142 in 2011, 1155 in 2012, 1097 in 2013, 1056 in 2014, 1136 in 2015, 1456 in 2016, and 2351 in 2017 (to date October, 16th, 2017) (UTAS, 2017b). UTAS also hopes to double that number of Chinese international students by 2018 (UTAS, 2015). In this way, these thousands of Chinese international students have made a decision that differed so significantly from their compatriots, and engaged in higher education in regional Australia, and so it is essential to explore their motivations for this choice to better understand their rationale, and the benefits that they hope to experience through it.

In addition to finding out why Chinese international students choose to come to a regional university like UTAS, it is interesting to note that there are differences in enrolments in different courses. This is also a phenomenon that needed to be investigated in this study. According to unpublished UTAS data from 2016 (UTAS, 2017a), the Tasmanian School of Business & Economics (TSBE) contributed the largest proportion (51%) of Chinese international student enrolment at UTAS. The next largest faculty was the Faculty of Science, Engineering & Technology (SET) (28%) which includes the School of Engineering & ICT, the School of Biological Sciences, the School of Physical Sciences, the School of Land and Food, and the School of Architecture and Design (see Figure 1.5). These two faculties accounted for 79% of all UTAS Chinese international student enrolments.



¹ The data are made up of the numbers of onshore international students with Chinese or Hong Kong citizenship on Tasmanian UTAS campuses. For student privacy reasons, Macau student data were not included, given the very small number of students from there (<5).

Figure 1.5. Proportion of enrolments for Chinese onshore international students at UTAS by faculty, 2016 (UTAS, 2017a).

Table 1.1 shows the top 10 courses for Chinese international student enrolments at UTAS in 2016. Most of the courses were bachelor's degree or masters by coursework programs, and came primarily from two faculties, TSBE and SET (UTAS, 2017a). Courses in Business, particularly Accounting, IT and Engineering, were the most popular for Chinese international students. Enrolments in the top two courses were far ahead of the rest (UTAS, 2017a).

Table 1.1

Top 10 Courses for the Largest Enrolments of Chinese International Students at UTAS, 2016¹

Faculty	Course	Enrolment
TSBE	Master of Professional Accounting (Specialisation)	296
TSBE	Bachelor of Business	185
SET	Master of Information Technology and Systems	95
SET	Bachelor of Information and Communication Technology	49
TSBE	Master of Professional Accounting	47
SET	Bachelor of Engineering	43
SET	Bachelor of Information Systems	40
SET	Bachelor of Engineering (Honours)	38
Health	Doctor of Philosophy (Medical Studies)	36
TSBE	Graduate Certificate in Professional Accounting	34

Note. Adapted from “Count of Enrolments for International Onshore Students with Country of Citizenship = China or Hong Kong, by Faculty, by Course, as at 31 December 2010 to 2016 and 19 June 2017,” by UTAS, 2017b. *Unpublished raw data.*

World-class specialist courses and superior disciplines at UTAS seem to be particularly fascinating for Chinese international students. UTAS has three world famous specialist institutes: the Australian Maritime College (AMC), the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS), and the Menzies Institute for Medical Research, which offer a large number of specialist courses. The UTAS subjects of Agricultural Sciences, Earth Sciences, Ecology, Geography, and Education were also ranked within the top 200 in the world, according to the new Global Ranking of Academic Subjects in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), announced in June 2017 (Shanghai Ranking, 2017).

Moreover, according to information provided on the UTAS website (UTAS, 2017), UTAS has unique capabilities and expertise across five major research themes, Environment, Resources and Sustainability; Creativity, Culture and Society; Better Health; Marine, Antarctic and

¹ Different highlights stand for different faculty courses.

Maritime; and Data, Knowledge and Decision. Seeing this broad distribution across disciplines of Chinese international students at UTAS, it will be useful especially for UTAS to find out what motivated them to choose a particular university course.

1.4 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

The aim of this research is to examine the decisions made by Chinese international students when selecting to study in a regional Australian university, as well as to discover their post-sojourn satisfaction with their decision. There is also a more general aim, to develop models for students' decision making. To address this aim, this study focuses on two major research objectives with related research questions:

Objective 1: To examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university.

This objective will be examined through four research questions:

Question 1.1: What are the factors influencing the choices of Chinese international students in their decision to enrol in a regional Australian university?

Question 1.2: What decision-making processes do Chinese international students go through when deciding to enrol in a regional Australian university?

Question 1.3: What decision-making models can be identified for Chinese international students choosing to study in a regional Australian university?

Question 1.4: Is it possible to derive more general decision-making models for overseas study? If yes, what are these models?

Objective 2: To identify how Chinese international students perceive their experiences of a regional Australian university after their overseas study sojourn.

This objective will be examined through one research question:

Question 2: Did Chinese international students evaluate their decision to study at a regional Australian university as worthwhile after graduation from this university?

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

1.5.1 Chinese International Students

The most commonly-cited concept of international students in the existing research is “those who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study” (OECD, 2017, p. 297). The country of origin of a tertiary student is defined according to the criterion of “country of prior education” or “country of usual residence” (OECD, 2017, p. 297). Building upon this, and combining it with the context of China, the term Chinese international students is used here to refer to students with citizenship of the People's Republic of China, including mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, who have left China and moved to another country for the purpose of study, and who are on temporary student visas without permanent or usual residence in their host country.

1.5.2 Regional Australia

So far, there is no exhaustive list of Australian regions. They are grouped by economic function or delineated for administrative or marketing purposes at the Australian federal, state, and local levels (Eversole, 2016). There are various representative definitions of regional Australia. Eversole (2016) stated that, in several academic studies, regions in Australia are non-metropolitan places and “people who live in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, or Canberra are not regional” (p. 2).

The Regional Australia Institute (2017) is a think tank devoted to issues concerning regional Australia, and it provides an authoritative definition: “Regional Australia includes all of the towns, small cities and areas that lie beyond the major capital cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra).” The main weakness of this definition is that Hobart, the capital of Tasmania is excluded from the major Australian capital cities.

Regional immigration advantages were a factor for Chinese international students coming to regional Australia for study (see section 9.5), so information about regional Australia in the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) should be considered here. For the purpose of immigration, the DIBP (2017a) has provided a list of regional Australia/low population growth metropolitan areas. This includes New South Wales, except for Sydney, Newcastle, the Central Coast and Wollongong; Queensland, except for the greater Brisbane area and the Gold Coast; Victoria, except for the Melbourne metropolitan area; Western Australia, except for Perth and surrounding areas; the entire South Australia state; the entire Tasmanian state; and the entire Northern Territory.

With these delineations in mind, the following definition has been developed and adopted for this research: Regional Australia refers to places which are located outside of Australian metropolitan centres. Except for Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, and Canberra, all other Australia areas are regional Australia. According to this definition, and from the perspective of government funding, the entire Tasmania state is regional, including its capital city, Hobart.

1.5.3 Regional Australian University

It is quite difficult to define a regional Australian university rigidly, with no single agreed definition and no official list of regional Australian universities. It seems, therefore, to be largely a matter of self-definition. There is an alliance of six regional Australian universities under the Regional Universities Network (RUN), but many other regional Australian universities including UTAS, are not members of this Network.

Perhaps it is understandable that there is no agreed definition of a regional Australian university: There are more than 70 regional university campuses spread all over Australia (Eversole, 2016),

and 99.9% of the country's land mass can be classified as regional (DET, 2016a).¹

The current discussion in academia is centred on conceptualising the terminology of regional university campuses in Australia, and the viewpoint put forward by Allison and Eversole (2008) is representative in this. They categorised regional university campuses in Australia into three types. First, some Australian universities are considered regional because they are located outside Australian metropolitan centres; the second type is where a regional campus is established to serve a special geographic region, even in major metropolises; and the third is a non-metropolitan campus supported by a metropolitan university, and which plays a role in regional engagement (Allison & Eversole, 2008). This was used as the basis of the definition of regional Australian universities used in this research. That is, a regional Australian university is taken to refer to a university in Australia whose main campuses are located outside the major Australian metropolitan centres and mandated to serve their own particular regions.

According to this, UTAS can be considered a regional Australian university, since Tasmania itself is itself regional, the main campuses are all in Tasmania, and these main campuses have a unique role in serving the state since it is the only university in the state. In this way, UTAS is a typical regional Australian university.

1.6 Conclusion

Higher education for international students has become a major international enterprise. For Australia it is particularly important as it is the country's third largest foreign exchange earner. The largest group of international students, both worldwide and in Australia, come from China. In Australia, the large majority head to the major capital cities. Only about 1% of all Chinese tertiary students go to Tasmania to study.

This research aims to understand the decision making of Chinese international students, and why the sample in the study chose to enrol in UTAS, a regional university. The case study of decision making of Chinese international students at a regional Australian university is generalised into decision-making models that may apply to overseas university study.

The next chapter will elaborate on the unconventional structure of this thesis.

¹ Regional Australia in that document refers to non-capital areas in Australia. Capital Australian areas include all state and territory capital cities and the Gold Coast (DET, 2016e). DET defined the term of regional Australia in 2016.

Chapter 2 Structure of the Thesis

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the structure of this thesis. Its focus encompasses reasons why it “goes off the beaten track” and develops an unconventional structure, instead of simply adopting a conventional structure. That structure will be mapped out, and a content overview of each chapter will be given.

2.2 Rationale for the Structure of This Thesis

An unconventional structure is adopted in this thesis. It follows a mixed methods approach through deep integration of quantitative data and qualitative data. This induction-dominated presentation of theory formulation and development is under the guidance of systematic grounded theory and based on a proposed literature-derived framework for making choices, which provides readers with a comprehensive and logical insight for understanding the results of this research (Wu & Kember, 2018).

This thesis structure is consistent with the paradigm, methodology and subject matter of this research. One of its characteristics is the suitability of a mixed methods approach to the subject matter, particularly that of a convergent mixed methods one. In its major phrase, quantitative and qualitative data are collected in parallel, in a convergent mixed methods fashion, so the convergence of both of these streams of data becomes a unique contribution of this research. Data analysis, results and discussion are presented in one part of the thesis (Part B). In detail, both forms of data are combined and discussed in each theme chapter, and results and discussion are ordered according to themes. This is so findings for each theme can be presented holistically and exhaustively. What is more, the macro-level analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data is all located in one Chapter 5, rather than being separated into two chapters. This is to better and more clearly present the integration of the two sets of data under the guidance of the convergent mixed methods approach used here.

Another characteristic of this thesis structure is that reviewed literature plays two roles in different parts of this thesis. In Part A, Chapter 3: thematic overview of the literature provides a brief initial review of the relevant literature sufficient to build the framework that facilitates the development of the research instruments, including the survey questionnaire and interview schedules. In Chapter 4, the method and research design are explained, and the themes of decision making for Part B are identified. The remainder of the literature reviewed is embedded within Part B of this thesis, in the six chapters of detailed results and discussion, Chapters 6–11. In each results and discussion chapter, after results for each theme are presented, related literature is compared with identified results, and an attempt to maximise the links between literature and discussion are made. An exploration of the theoretical position of these results is provided from the relevant research fields.

Finally, the structure of this thesis is suited to theory-building research. More detailed information about its paradigmatic position is shown in Figure 2.1. The starting point for building theories is to find gaps in the research by reviewing previous literature and explore the potential research significance of these. Ideas and theories from that reviewed relevant literature are used to deductively derive the framework of this research, shown in Chapter 3. The research instruments then have been developed based on a mixture of personal experience, literature and discussion with Chinese international students, which are in a combination of inductive and deductive approaches.

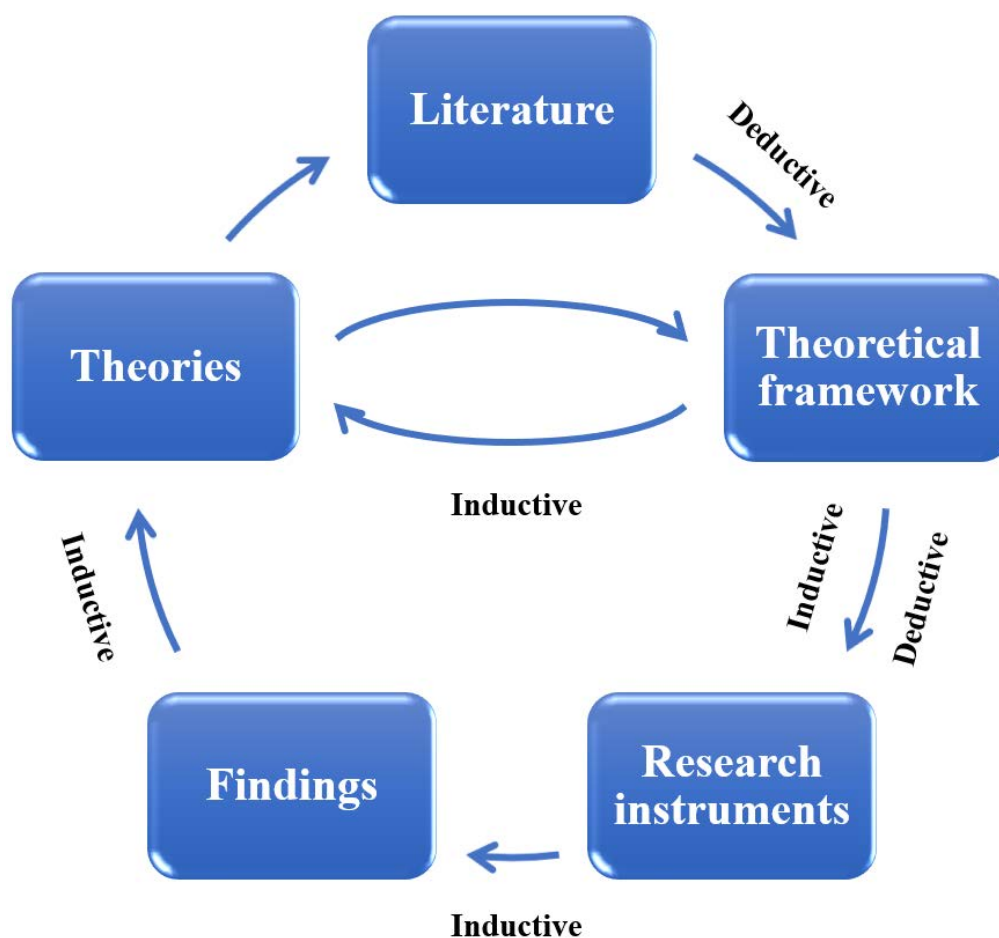


Figure 2.1. The development of the theory-building structure.

Due to the induction-dominated nature of this work, after these preparations are given, this thesis moves directly into inductively building theories on the collected data by means of research instruments guided by systematic grounded theory. The initial step of developing these theories is to report findings, which present student viewpoints about their six main choices in Chapters 6–11. After that in Chapters 13–14 the findings are linked together in a simplified way and inductively refined into theories. In other words, theories in this research exhibit a high level of interpretation of findings. This is a strength of the research here because it goes beyond simply reporting on findings, but it further refines them into decision-making models.

The theories are inductively established from the proposed literature-derived framework for making choices, and the research instruments and findings serve as a bridge between the framework and these. The presentation of the development of the theories is the main focus of this thesis. The theories discovered are a contribution to this field, and are especially useful for filling gaps in the existing body of research. Also, theories developed from this research play an active role in restructuring the original framework derived from the previous literature.

This induction-dominated theory formulation process is presented throughout the entire thesis. Theory building is elaborated on step by step in Chapter 3 and Chapters 6–14, based on its logical sequence (see Figure 2.1). Specifically, the six choices of decision making are identified from the reviewed literature in Chapter 3 (see Figure 3.2). Factors influencing each choice in decision making are discovered and discussed in each theme chapter from Chapters 6–11. Chapter 12 is devoted to evaluating the Chinese international students' pre-departure decisions for UTAS, in order to see whether they deemed them sensible in retrospect, and it identified the factors within that decision making that they deemed were right. Chapters 6–12 provide a foundation for Chapter 13. Chapter 13 focuses on the decision-making processes and goes on to establish the decision-making models of Chinese international students by revealing the underlying interaction of mechanism among their choices, factors and processes. In Chapter 14 the decision-making models from the case are generalised to formulate international student decision-making models in a broader context. In this way, until the end of Chapter 14, theories in this research are explicitly formulated and refined.

This is therefore an appropriate structure for reporting on a mixed methods study of students' decision making and for presenting constructed theories that have emerged from an integration of qualitative and quantitative data, following an induction-dominated approach underpinned by systematic grounded theory.

2.3 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis shows an organisational structure three parts, Part A: introduction, Part B: analysis, results and discussion, and Part C: conclusion. These three parts are then divided into 15 chapters. The contents of these three parts and the 15 chapters are outlined below.

Part A: Introduction

As an overall guide to the thesis, Part A provides a comprehensive overview, and maps out the scope of the research. It includes the introduction, literature review, and methodology. It offers a clear understanding of what the research is about and how this study was undertaken. It includes four chapters, Chapter 1: introduction; Chapter 2: structure of the thesis; Chapter 3: thematic overview of the literature; Chapter 4: method and research design. Outlines of these four chapters follow.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents a brief introduction of this study. It provides the micro-level background of the research through a personal account of my own decision making around overseas study, and as an emerging phenomenon among Chinese international students. Also, it gives a macro-level background relating to the global context of international higher education. These lead on to the research aims, objectives and research questions. Additionally, key terms utilised in this research are defined.

Chapter 2: Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 of the thesis provides an overview of underlying reasons to select the structure for this thesis and previews this thesis structure. This structure is suited to the convergent mixed methods approach as it integrates quantitative and qualitative data, and is the best presentation of the induction-dominated nature of this research under the guidance of systematic grounded theory.

Chapter 3: Thematic overview of the literature

Chapter 3 of the thesis first develops the relational framework of the relevant constructs, which guides the structure not just of this chapter but of the entire thesis. The literature closely related to this research topic is then reviewed. The purpose of this is to build the literature-derived framework for making choices, and so it only presents the most relevant literature necessary for that. In the chapter, the literature is presented in the form of themes, in terms of the diverse elements involved in international students' decision making. The thematic literature eventually leads to the establishment of a framework on student choice facets for overseas study. That is then utilised to develop the research instruments and to interpret the data in Part B of this thesis. In Part B, a larger amount of other literature is discussed in comparison with the obtained research results.

Chapter 4: Method and research design

This chapter presents a complete picture of method and research design for this study. The methodological principles underpinning it are located within a convergent mixed methods approach, including both qualitative and quantitative methods. Underlying this convergent mixed methods approach, this research combines deductive and inductive approaches with an induction-dominated nature. That is, the qualitative method, drawing on aspects of systematic grounded theory, adheres to an inductive approach; while the deductive approach also contributes to the quantitative method in this study. This chapter details the development of the research instruments on the basis of the proposed literature-derived framework for making choices. Methods and procedures of data collection are then outlined. It also provides detailed information on case, sampling and participants. At the end of the chapter, the principles behind the methods for data analysis are introduced. The details of data analysis will be elaborated on in Parts B and C.

Part B: Analysis, results and discussion

Part B presents an analysis of the gathered data, reports on the results and discussion, and further develops the theories. The macro-level analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data is first shown in Chapters 5. Chapters 6–11 then present the results and discussion for the six themes in logical order to address the first research question under the first research objective. Chapter 12 then focuses an evaluation of the original decision of students to study at UTAS in order to establish decision-making models in the next chapter and to achieve the second research objective. Chapter 13 interprets the decision-making processes and constructs the decision-making models of the case study, which address the two other research questions of the first research objective.

Chapter 5: Macro-level analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data

Chapter 5 details the process of development and the preliminary results of the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The micro level analysis of both sets of data will be presented in the following chapters of results and discussion. The data analysis in phase one is delineated first, which is then followed by a discussion of phase-two data analysis and then the convergence of results from the two phases of data analysis. In the section of phase-one data analysis, three significant steps are encompassed, that is, quantitative data analysis, qualitative data analysis and the consolidation of the preliminary results from both data analyses. After the survey data are acquired, quantitative data from questionnaires are analysed using SPSS. This chapter shows the demographic distribution of the survey respondents. It then presents the reliability of the scales within the questionnaire. The frequencies of scales items are then outlined and it then looks at the process and preliminary results of the qualitative data analysis in phase one at a macro level. An overview of the interviewee sample is also introduced. Qualitative data collected from phase-one interviews and open-ended section in questionnaires are then analysed in NVivo through three steps of open, axial, and selective coding under the methodological guidance of systematic grounded theory. The preliminary results of the qualitative data analysis of phase one then emerge. The last step in phase-one of data analysis is to converge the preliminary results from both data analyses. The end of this chapter presents the data analysis of phase two and the convergence of the results from the two phases of data analyses.

Chapter 6: Results and discussion for theme–Higher education

Chapter 7: Results and discussion for theme–Overseas

Chapter 8: Results and discussion for theme–Australia

Chapter 9: Results and discussion for theme–Tasmania

Chapter 10: Results and discussion for theme–UTAS

Chapter 11: Results and discussion for theme–Course

The themes of Chapters 6–11 cover the group of choices that the Chinese international students made, in the order of first, decisions for higher education, going overseas, choosing Australia,

then Tasmania, UTAS and finally their particular course. Chapters 6–11 adopt an identical structure to present the results and provide discussion. For example, Chapter 6 is the results and discussion for the theme of higher education. It reports the results for the first theme according to the literature-derived framework for making choices about why Chinese international students seek higher education. The highlight of this chapter is a deep melding of quantitative and qualitative data in the presentation of findings. The descriptive statistics summary of the survey data for this theme is provided at the beginning of the chapter. Most sub-themes presented are from quantitative data while other sub-themes are identified from the qualitative data. In each sub-theme section, results from quantitative data analysis is reinforced or compared with any pertinent qualitative results, so as to interpret each factor holistically. The similarity or the dissimilarity these two type results yielded is then discussed in detail. Results are finally compared with the theories reviewed in the closely related literature.

Chapter 12: Post-sojourn satisfaction with the decision to study at UTAS

Chapter 12 of this thesis explores Chinese international students' satisfaction with their decisions to receive higher education at UTAS. By presenting the results of the qualitative data in the second phase, this chapter reports on the UTAS study outcomes of the Chinese international students, including issues around employment, education and PR outcomes. It then gives an assessment of student decisions for higher education at UTAS. These two parts are primarily to evaluate the students' reflections on their pre-departure decisions to come to UTAS, and discover the factors that influenced them when making that decision. This will then be the foundation for formulating the decision-making models of the next chapter. The chapter addresses the research question under the second research objective.

Chapter 13: Decision-making models of the Chinese international students in the case study

Building on the six chapters of factors that have influenced the decisions of the Chinese international students, and the former chapter on the evaluation of their decisions about it, Chapter 13 interprets their decision-making processes, and constructs decision-making models for their choices. At first, a choice-strength framework is constructed inductively in an effort to discover the students' decision-making processes. Taking account of the importance of each choice in results of the analysis of the first-phase of qualitative data, this framework encompasses a set of six spectra with poles representing the strength of choices in the decision made. Arising from this framework, the decision-making processes of Chinese international students are identified in the form of a set of flowcharts, and they restructure the literature-derived framework for making choices of the research, so that the second research question under the first research objective is addressed. The grounded decision-making models of Chinese international students in selecting UTAS are thus derived, through the construction of decision-making processes and combining the findings of the decision-making factors reported in Chapters 6–11. The discovery of these decision-making models address the third research question under the first research objective.

Part C: Conclusion

In conclusion, Part C mainly provides a summary of the findings and the theories of this study along with a discussion about them. It presents more general decision-making models, and which addresses the last question under the first research objective and achieve the first research objective. In this thesis structure, Part C briefly reflects on what has been discovered, which corresponds to questions posed in Part A.

Chapter 14: Contributions to new knowledge

This chapter reflects on the theoretical conclusion of this study by presenting what has been achieved, and generalises the decision-making models from the last chapter in a broader context. First, the research aims, objectives and research questions are revisited and examined to determine to what extent these have been achieved or addressed. Second, it derives more general decision-making models which are applicable to international students from diverse countries who seek overseas higher education.

Chapter 15: Implications for policy, practice and future research

The focus of this chapter is implications in both practical and conceptual senses. It firstly puts forward recommendations with a consideration about study findings and theories for practice and policy, and suggestions from research participants. Then, some implications for future research are offered. Lastly, it provides an important opportunity to clarify the conceptual and theoretical significance of this research.

Chapter 3 Thematic Overview of the Literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to this research, in order to establish a framework for international students' choice making. It was necessary to establish such a framework for this research because existing theories have not addressed the problems directly. Since the theories arising from this study were actually "grounded" in the data, a framework was vital as a foundation for generating these theories. In particular, the framework was important in developing the research instruments, explained in the next chapter, as well as addressing the research questions in Parts B and C of this thesis.

The literature review in this chapter is critical rather than comprehensive. The focus here is only on some of the key literature that are related to this research, sufficient to derive a framework for data gathering. Even though this review does not comprehensively expound all relevant literature, the major views from the relevant literature are covered in this chapter according to their contributions to the story of this study.

The main body of the pertinent literature will be presented along with the results and discussion in Chapters 6–11 of this thesis instead of in this chapter. To be specific, the closely related theories reported in previous literature will be compared with the findings of this research in these chapters. At the micro level, this approach has been adopted to contribute establishing the connection between the pertinent literature and the results of this research. At the macro level, the purpose is to identify the theoretical positions of the findings from this research within the relevant research fields.

The primary focus of this chapter is on the current decision-making literature concerning Asian international students, particularly that of Chinese international students within the Australian context. Although the context of this case study was a regional Australian university, there has been little research to date about international students' decisions of regional higher education.

There have been some valuable, highly relevant studies of international students studying in diverse countries, hence this review has not been limited only to research on Chinese international students in Australia. For example, some literature (Duan, 1997; Harris & Nibbler, 1998; Stewart, 2017) identified cross-cultural differences between the adolescent Chinese student population and their Anglo counterparts in their decision making about overseas education. These studies recognised the influence of culture and traditions, such as the mindsets of eastern collectivism and Western individualism. There is some doubt about whether decision-making models from these two populations are totally different. That is, the distinct cultures and traditions are seen to influence some aspects of an individual's decision making, but not the overall decision making. Several studies revealed that, in this age of globalisation and the internet, the world is becoming borderless, and so college students' decision-making styles are now multi-dimensional (e.g. Fang, 2012; Yi & Park, 2003).

3.2 Relational Framework of Relevant Constructs

The complexity of students' decision making to engage in higher education abroad cannot be underestimated. It encompasses multiple aspects that work together simultaneously. It is necessary to examine these aspects systematically and holistically in order to understand all aspects fully. Loosely inspired by Duan (1997), Pimpa (2002) and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), this research has found that international students' decision making for overseas higher education is dynamic, ongoing and encompasses four main constructs: choices, factors, processes and decision-making models. Figure 3.1 shows that the relationships among choices, factors, processes and decision-making models. To be specific, processes encompass a group of inter-related choices (see the arrow from choices to processes), with each choice limiting the others. The arrow from factors to choices represents that each choice is influenced and shaped by a series of contributing factors. In other words, decision-making factors underlie all choices in the processes, which could be seen in the arrow from factors to processes. These choices, factors and processes are interrelated (see two plus signs) and play a part in decision-making models (see three arrows pointing to decision-making models). All in all, the above dynamic interactions of choices, the underlying factors and decision-making processes, constitute international students' decision-making models.

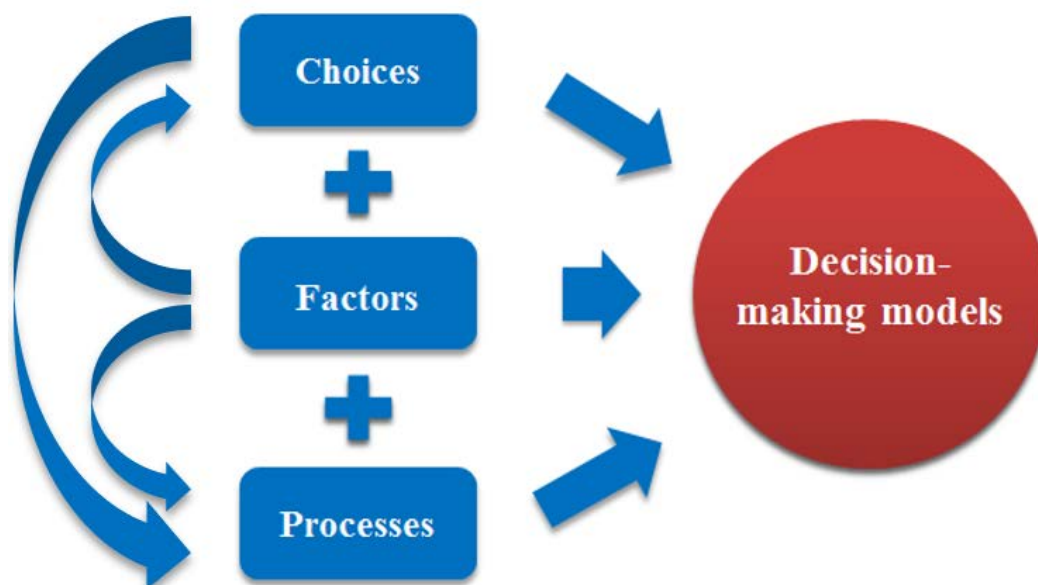


Figure 3.1. The relational framework of relevant constructs.

The layout of this chapter deals with the four major themes depicted in the relational framework of Figure 3.1. The first is concerned with the major choices made by students when selecting overseas higher education, presented in section 3.3. Section 3.4 deals with the second theme, factors influencing international students' decisions about studying higher education abroad. The third theme is addressed in section 3.5 and is about international students' decision-making processes around higher education abroad. The fourth theme is student decision-making

models for international higher education, in section 3.6.

As a result of the review of core literature presented here, the literature-derived framework for making choices is described in section 3.7, the conclusion of this chapter.

3.3 Students' Major Choices When Selecting Overseas Higher Education

This section aims to identify the major choices made by international students when selecting overseas higher education as reported in the pertinent literature.

As mentioned above, it has been suggested that international students' decisions about overseas higher education encompass a series of choices. However, many previous studies (e.g. Zwart, 2012) have not distinguished between these choices. Rather, they tend to call them collectively an "international higher education destination choice." In doing so, selecting overseas higher education is seen as a single-step decision. In reality, the choices can be classified into different groups. Therefore, as with much other decision making, the decisions made by international students are complicated and multi-faceted, and hence they should be viewed as the result of a series of choices rather than a one-step process or a single choice (Carlson, 1993; Duan, 1997; Menon & Carspecken, 1990; Reddy, 2014).

It is strongly evident from a considerable number of studies in different settings (e.g. Maringe & Carter, 2007; Reddy, 2014) that the definition of decision making in other fields is highly applicable to higher education. Researchers have conceptualised decision making as a complex process that entails numerous phrases (Maringe & Carter, 2007), as well as sometimes elevated ones like; "the act of choosing one alternative from a set of alternatives" (Griffin, 2013, p. 96), or making a final decision between a range of available or alternative options (Reddy, 2014).

Also, in the cognitive perspective popular in academia, decision making should be examined as a "personal problem-solving process." In other words, decision-making behaviour occurs in conjunction with some other performances (Heppner, Petersen, & Weinstein, 1981). This decision requires a chain of responses which the person has the ability to perform immediately and adequately (Duan, 1997).

On the other hand, in the context of international higher education, past research (Carlson, 1993; Duan, 1997) has revealed that it is inadequate to concentrate only on one choice of the many that make up overseas study, such as the choice of country, since this choice is neither the only one made, nor is it an isolated choice in the whole decision-making process. Instead, the choice is dictated by others, like the selection of the academic program. This then leads on to even more choices, such as the options of a particular university. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine all the contingent choices of international students in their extended decision-making processes.

However, the majority of extant studies in this field (e.g. Bamber, 2014; Bodycott, 2009; Lawley, 1993; Yang, 2007) only spotlighted one or two of the choices relating to overseas study; the choice to study abroad or the choice to go to a particular country. Liu (2015) described these as “whether to go” and “where to go” (pp.40, 44). However, other related choices, such as the choice of region, have not received much attention. These choices are often considered as independent entities (Chapman, 1989). Nonetheless, in reality, they are largely inter-related, as the outcome of one choice limits the other.

There is a growing body of literature (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Chen, 2007a, 2007b; Duan, 1997; Liu, 2015; Manns & Swift, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002; Yang, 2010) demonstrating that decisions about overseas higher education involve a wide variety of choices. That research mostly adopted a retrospective approach, targeting international students studying in higher education institutions in Australia, the U.K. or the U.S.A. These host countries are the ones with the largest distribution of international tertiary students in the world (see Figure 1.1). The target populations in other relevant studies (Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2010) were prospective international students who were still living in their home countries. The majority of these studies (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Chen, 2007a, 2007b; Duan, 1997; Liu, 2015; Manns & Swift, 2016; Pimpa, 2002; Yang, 2010) focused on Chinese or other Asian international students.

The earliest systematic study, and most important work to explain the major choices made by international students, was Duan’s doctoral dissertation on the factors influencing the choices made by Chinese international students from Hong Kong and Malaysia when selecting South Australian universities (1997). Duan discovered that Asian international students made six major choices prior to studying abroad: to undertake higher education, to study abroad, the choice of country, the choice of a state within that country, the selection of a particular university, and the choice of an academic course.

Later, another three scholars, Pimpa (2002), Chen (2007a, 2007b) and Liu (2015), respectively identified five common choices of Asian international students in Australia, Canada, the U.K. and the U.S.A. These were the same as the last five choices described by Duan. In the same vein, a few extant studies (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2010) that explored factors influencing international students’ decisions revealed that they took account of either three or four underlying choices of the six acknowledged by Duan (1997). Overall, however, none of these studies have attempted to elaborate on the underlying choices made by Chinese international students who select regional Australia.

This research adopted Duan’s six-choice finding (1997), on the grounds that these six choices are more comprehensive and holistic than those identified by other academics. In other words, choices ignored in other studies (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Chen, 2007a, 2007b; Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002; Yang, 2010) can play a vital role in international students’ decision making. These six choices turned out to be consistent with the data of my study. My research, therefore, examined international students’ decisions around six major and distinct choices as well as the case of Chinese international students’ decisions about a regional

Australian university, namely, (1) to choose to progress to higher education, (2) to choose to study overseas, (3) to select the country (Australia) for study, (4) to select the region (Tasmania), (5) to select the university (UTAS), and (6) to select the particular course of study.

3.4 Factors Influencing International Students' Decisions for Higher Education Abroad

The purpose of this section is to critically examine factors which influence international students' decisions. Detailed information on each factor will not be discussed. Factors will be dealt with in more detail in the results and discussion chapters, Chapters 6–11.

The first studies which featured international students' motivations to engage in overseas higher education included exploratory, descriptive and broad-based research around students in Australia in the 1980s (Duan, 1997). This research set the direction for more detailed studies later.

Opinions related to the flow of international students vary, but the push-pull theory is the most classic framework that has been employed to facilitate understanding and describe the decision-making factors influencing international students (e.g. Agarwal & Winkler, 1985; Azmat et al., 2013; Bodycott, 2009; Bohman, 2009; Cummings, 1984; Duan, 1997; Kawai, 2005; Li & Bray, 2007; Li, 2013; Liu, 2013; Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; McMahon, 1992; Pimpa, 2002; Stewart, 2017; Wang, Whitehead, & Bayes, 2017; Wang, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2012). Before the push-pull theory was propounded, some studies (Radford, Ongkili, & Toyoizumi, 1984; Spaulding, Flack, Tate, Mahon, & Marshall, 1976) had already started to focus on the particular factors influencing international students, but they lacked a comparatively integrated theoretical system to describe it. The use of push-pull theory broke through this impasse.

Since the geographer Ernst Ravenstein described the “laws of migration” to explain why a population flows out of one particular area into others (1889), the push-pull theory has been utilised in diverse disciplines, such as international immigration, international tourism and international education, for more than 100 years (Liu, 2015). Push-pull theory then began to be used, from the time of Rao (1979) and Cummings (1984), to explain the reasons for students to head overseas for higher education.

Because of the importance of its contribution, it is worthwhile to discuss the push-pull theory in more detail. One of the most highly cited studies analysing international student mobility in the context of this theory was that of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). They defined “‘push’ factors as those operate within the source country and initiate a student’s decision to undertake international study. ‘Pull’ factors operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students” (p. 82). Through a four-year survey of 2485 Chinese, Indian, Indonesian and Taiwanese prospective international students, who were bound for different education sectors in Australia, they identified the presence of four push factors (perceptions of quality; course availability and ability to gain entry; opportunity to learn more

about the West; and intention to migrate) and an equal number of pull factors (reputation or profile of the host country and institution; links with alumni; competitive costs and the possibility of part-time work; as well as the appeal of the physical environment). In their longitudinal study, push factors were involved in the choice to go abroad, while pull factors were engaged when the prospective international students picked a host country and an institution. Push factors and pull factors usually work in conjunction and depend upon each other, while each corresponds to different choices in international students' decision making (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

The Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory (2002) suggests multi-dimensional explanations behind international students' choices, and highlights different types of mobility. Their work was, therefore, followed by a large number of subsequent studies from 2002 to now (e.g. Azmat et al., 2013; Bodycott, 2009; Bohman, 2009; Buddhichiwin, 2013; Kawai, 2005; Li & Bray, 2007; Li, 2013; Liu, 2013; Liu, 2015; Pimpa, 2002; Stewart, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Wang, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2012). The majority of the studies adopting Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory have been empirical and have examined the movement of international students to Western countries such as Australia and the U.K. A large and growing body of literature (e.g. Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2007b; Lawson & Australian Education International, 2011; Li & Bray, 2007; Liu, 2015; Lu, Mavondo, & Qiu, 2009; Yan, 2010; Yang, 2007; Zheng & Dai, 2006) has followed and attempted to understand the key factors influencing Chinese international students' decisions about overseas study destinations, mainly along the line of the choices to study abroad and the choice of a host country.

Whilst the Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory (2002) is valuable as an explanatory mechanism and is employed widely to understand motivations influencing international students, it was not adopted for this study due to several drawbacks.

First of all, Mazzarol and Soutar failed to discuss all six choices involved in student decisions. In fact, they only elaborated upon factors related to three of them (the choice to study abroad, the choice of a particular country, and the choice of a particular institution). The factors for the other three choices were ignored. Some writers (e.g. Chen, 2007b; Liu, 2015) have attempted to discuss more choices, but none of this research has considered the factors impacting on all six choices. Even though Duan's research (1997) identified all six choices, he only chose to articulate the specific factors relating to a few of them. This pinpointed the importance of the current research investigating the factors which influence all six choices.

Second, even though the push and pull factors described by Mazzarol and Soutar are external forces that influence international students' behaviours and choices, much also depends upon the students' individual preferences and personal characteristics, such as their socio-economic status, academic ability, gender, age, motivations, and aspirations (Chen, 2007b; Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviño, 2006; Lee, 2007; Liu, 2013; Park, 2009; Peyton, 2005; Wilkins et al., 2012). These are largely unaccounted for by Mazzarol and Soutar, and were therefore examined in my research.

Third, the Mazzarol and Soutar's theory only takes into account the home country's push and pull factors which emanate from the host country and its institutions, but it ignores the pull factors from the source country and its universities, as well as the push factors from the host country and its institutions. In other words, the source country and its institutions not only have negative factors pushing students outward, but they also have positive forces pulling them back in (to stay there) (Li & Bray, 2007). Similarly, the host country and its institutions not only have positive factors attracting international students, but also negative forces that repel them (Li & Bray, 2007). Pull factors at home and push factors overseas were given the name "reverse push-pull factors" by Li and Bray (2007, p. 795). Thus, these authors refined and extended the Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory from a one-way push and pull system to a two-way one (Li & Bray, 2007). Combining individual value and these reverse push-pull factors, Liu (2013) extended the concept of push and pull factors from unilateral to bilateral in the context of Chinese international students deciding to study in the U.S.A. More specifically, he extended the Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory to propose a new version. This included pull factors from the home country, the host country and the individual, as well as the push factors from these three directions (Liu, 2013).

Finally, the Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory (2002) paid negligible attention to push and pull factors from third countries. This is also an issue with the theory proposed by Li and Bray (2007) and Liu's new push-pull theory (2013). My study, therefore, sought to compare the push and pull forces of Australia and other popular host countries that also attract international students.

Based on the above elaboration of the limitations of the Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory (2002), it can be seen that this theory has limited significance for my research. Many studies (e.g. Chen, 2007b; Cubillo et al., 2006; Lee, 2007; Li & Bray, 2007; Liu, 2013; Park, 2009; Peyton, 2005; Wilkins et al., 2012) have sought to refine the theory, but problems with its framework are far from solved. In addition, the issues discussed above make it clear that the factors identified in the theory of Mazzarol and Soutar were simplified and less than comprehensive, but they are valuable and certainly inspired my research. These factors from the Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory were included in this research as one source from which to develop the questionnaire. However, I went beyond the push and pull factors defined by Mazzarol and Soutar and develop a more complex and comprehensive approach.

3.5 Decision-Making Processes of International Students Around Higher Education Abroad

The research area around international student decision-making processes is still in a relatively pioneering stage (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). While much research (Chen, 2007a, 2007b; Cubillo et al., 2006; Duan, 1997) on international students' decisions has focused on the factors which influence their choices, direct and explicit inquiries into the processes involved in their decision making have been extremely limited. This may be because complex phenomena, such as international students' decision making, are not easily amenable to study

(Rivers, 2004). This idea was supported by Carroll and Johnson (1990), who claimed that “decision makers frequently are unable to articulate their underlying decision processes, or are interested in presenting a favourable impression” (p. 31).

The focus of the majority of this literature is on decision-making processes involved in receiving overseas higher education and it derives from consumer behaviour theories in marketing. The Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) model (Engel, Kollat, & Blackwell, 1973), is the most widely used theory about consumer decision-making processes. Created in 1973, the EKB model encompasses both products and services for high involvement decisions. This model was revised in 1986 as the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard (EBM) model (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995) “exploring the extended problem solving decision-making process of a high professional service in higher education for international students” (as cited in Yang, 2010, p. 63). This model includes a five-step consecutive process: need, search for information, evaluate alternatives, make decision and post-choice evaluation (Engel et al., 1995). Several academics (e.g. Hildén, 2011; Lawley, 1993; Yang, 2010) have taken up the five steps of this model and attempted to reshape it by adding new contexts in an effort to clarify the associations between variables.

Neither the EKB model nor the or EBM model was adopted for this research for a number of reasons. First of all, the EKB decision-making process (Engel et al., 1973), the EBM decision-making process (Engel et al., 1995) and the EBM-like processes (e.g. Hildén, 2011; Lawley, 1993; Yang, 2010) cannot explain the factors that influence each step of the decision-making process. These are the most critical parts, and the focus of this research. Second, the EKB decision-making process is business-focused, while my research was focused on international students within higher education. Last, a decision-making process is most useful when it is simplified. Borrowing from a statement made by Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1973), academics who study decision making inevitably need to make minimum assumptions and aim for maximum precision. That is, the presentation of decision-making processes should be as simple as possible without losing accuracy. According to the law of parsimony, researchers aim to reduce and simplify phenomena into its major components. The EKB decision-making process and the EBM decision-making process were considered to be too complicated for this research. Therefore, my study set out to refined understanding of the decision-making processes used by students and to use this to contribute to simplified decision-making models.

As well as the studies that adopted consumer behaviour theories, a small amount of previous research has examined the sequential order of choices in the process of deciding about overseas education (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Chen, 2007a; Duan, 1997; Liu, 2015; Manns & Swift, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002; Yang, 2010). These were of considerable significance for this study. It has already been noted, in section 3.3, that international students make six choices when selecting overseas higher education. The literature (e.g. Pimpa, 2002) has also revealed a relationship between the different choices in international students’ decision making. In other words, choices are not independent, but causally related (Pimpa, 2002). That is, there is an order in the choice sequence. In an effort to present this sequential order of choices, this section will review existing studies which interpret three or more choices within

the decision-making processes. Research discussing only one or two choices has not been included in this section since they are far from what is needed to constitute a comprehensive decision-making process.

The studies identifying international student decision-making processes by presenting the sequential order of choices have focused mainly on Chinese international students, along with some other Asian international students, intending to undertake higher education, or having already studied in universities in Australia, the U.K. or Canada.

Prior studies which discussed three choices, such as Yang's research (2010) and the work from Buddhichiwin (2013), consistently adopted the decision-making process proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). In this, international students first decide to study internationally rather than locally, then they choose a destination country, followed by the selection of an academic institution. These three choices basically follow a logical sequential order. This decision-making process has been identified in a wide range of groups, including Chinese international students in Australian universities (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2010), Thai international postgraduates in U.K. higher education (Buddhichiwin, 2013), and prospective international students from Taiwan, India, China and Indonesia (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The drawback of this view is that it only encompasses three choices.

Limited attention has been devoted to the use of four sets of choices. Only Manns and Swift (2016) have done this, when investigating Chinese international postgraduates enrolled in a program in a U.K. university. They revealed that the students chose a host country first, a course second, an institution third and finally chose a city.

There is a diversity of former studies discussing international students' decision-making processes based on five choices (Chen, 2007a; Liu, 2015; Pimpa, 2002). Pimpa's study (2002) of Thai international tertiary students in Australia pinpointed that the sequential order of their five choices varied, but that the majority of them followed the same order. The choice to study abroad was the first one, leading to the choice of host country. The choices for country and city occurred together, and could be interchanged with the choice of academic course. Moreover, these Thai postgraduate students focused more on the choice of the academic program than the choice of a particular academic institution, hence they selected the course before choosing a university (Pimpa, 2002). This is consistent with the finding of Manns and Swift (2016). However, Pimpa (2002) found that the Thai undergraduates believed that the reputation of a university was more important than the academic course. The implication of Pimpa's research is that there are different decision-making processes used by students planning overseas higher education.

Chen (2007a) carried out an investigation of international students from China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan who were in Canadian graduate schools, and found that they first determined academic course before reaching what he called the "predisposition" stage. At the predisposition stage, pursuing overseas graduate education was the most important choice for them, which then influenced their approaches to the "search/selection/application" of country,

institution, and city. The latter three choices interact simultaneously and dynamically. Chen's research again demonstrated that international postgraduate students select their academic program prior to their university choice.

Totally different from the decision-making processes identified by Pimpa (2002) and Chen (2007a), a study by Liu (2015) showed that mainland Chinese international students generally considered undertaking higher education overseas rather than at home, and if so the next steps were to choose a destination country and city. Finally, they decided which higher education institution to go to, and which course to enrol in. Besides adding the city choice and the program choice, Liu's decision-making process (2015) has the same order as the sequence suggested by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Yang (2010) and Buddhichiwin (2013).

Duan's (1997) is the only research so far that has identified all six choices in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, only four of these six choices were made in the decision-making process however. This is because the sampled Chinese international students from Hong Kong and Malaysia who were in South Australia, did not have consistent. The inconsistency was in their choices of study subject and of state. The starting point of their decision-making process was whether to receive higher education, that was followed by considerations of the place to study. Choosing to study overseas was the second step. They then considered which host country they preferred, and after that selected a university (Duan, 1997). All in all, this decision-making process is in logical order. The results of Duan's research matches what was observed by Pimpa (2002), that there are more decision-making processes of international students on overseas higher education than one. Additionally, this decision-making process from Duan is not comprehensive, due to a lack of consistent empirical evidence. He therefore suggests that future study develops more realistic and more comprehensive decision-making processes (1997).

Clearly, from the research evidence discussed here, it is difficult to identify one consistent sequential order of choices to explain all the existing processes involved in international students' decision making about overseas higher education. Comparatively speaking however, the logical order of choices is supported by the majority of the studies (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Duan, 1997; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2010). As a consequence, the literature-derived framework for making choices adopted for the purpose of this research was the logical sequence of the six choices discussed here. This sequence was utilised as a provisional framework to test whether there was more than only one decision-making process, as has been implied in several of the research papers (e.g. Pimpa, 2002) reviewed here.

3.6 Student Decision-Making Models for International Higher Education

Following the review of the literature related to the choices, factors and processes involved in international students' decision making, this section seeks to examine the combination of these

three elements in the extant studies, in an effort to interpret how students go about making their decisions.

Past studies that have explored international students' decisions have focused largely on the factors influencing their decisions, with some attention given to their major choices and processes (see sections 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5). Much less has been done to develop appropriate decision-making models. In fact, former research has remained silent about defining models of international students' decision making. Student decision-making models are defined here as models which are made by presenting the dynamic and systematic connections, relationships and interactions of international students' decisions around choosing overseas higher education based on their main choices, and through many underlying factors and various processes.

In addition, decision-making processes and decision-making models have not been distinguished clearly in these studies, and therefore existing studies mix the usage of both terms together. Sometimes models that reflect the decision-making process only have been labelled "decision-making models" (e.g. Liu, 2015) but these clearly are too limited to explain the entirety of decision making. Some researchers (e.g. Manns & Swift, 2016) have aimed to discover the process of international students' decision making, but eventually they have presented decision-making models. This shows a need to be explicit about exactly what is meant by these terms.

This section will only discuss the already existing international student decision-making models (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Chen, 2007a; Duan, 1997; Manns & Swift, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), which include all three elements: choices, factors and processes. Most of these fail to meet other requirements in the definition of international student decision-making models made here. For example, they regard decision-making models as static rather than dynamic, or fail to interpret international students' decision making as a whole, instead to examine choices, factors and process separately.

Some of the few existing international student decision-making models encompass less than three of the six major choices (e.g. Lawley, 1993), and so are excluded from the discussion here due to the incompleteness of the decision-making processes described therein. In addition, this section does not include decision-making models from a business or a marketing point of view (e.g. Yang, 2010) on the grounds that, generally, choices and factors were not presented in their models, or that the research only focused on process.

There are five studies that have identified international student decision-making models. Chronologically, Duan's doctoral research (1997) built the first model, related to Chinese international students from Hong Kong and Malaysia who chose higher education in Australia. Although all six choices were identified in a preliminary study, this model contains only four: to pursue higher education, to go abroad, to go to Australia and to choose a particular higher education institution. The dependent factors were three types of influence, each from a different source: different reference groups, personal values and economic-educational circumstances. For reference groups and personal values, the strongest influences lay in the initial decision, to

receive higher education. Duan also reported that reference groups also affect the students' choices. This occurred in the following order: going abroad, studying in Australia and choosing a particular university. The influence of economic expenditure was equally influential on student choices for pursuing higher education and studying in Australia, but was less important for the choice of going overseas and for the university. Moreover, educational preference had a stronger influence on the choice of university than on the choice of country. But influence on both choices is weaker than that on the choices to undertake higher education and to go abroad. Nevertheless, there are certain drawbacks associated with Duan's decision-making model. The biggest problem is he focused on factors influencing international students' selection of a study destination, and therefore the decision-making model was just a by-product. This leads to another issue: The interaction among choices, factors and process is far from comprehensive, as Duan admitted. Additionally, only three types of factors are identified in his model, and other key potential factors are ignored. The incompleteness of the proposed model means that no diagram is utilised to explain the decision-making model in his research.

As seen previously, a push-pull model of international educational flows was proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). The major choices, factors and decision-making processes, as well as the interactions among these three elements in their research have already been presented. This model highlights which factor is the most important one in each choice. To be specific, in that study it was found that the most important influence pushing international students to study abroad is that an overseas course was better than a local one. The reputation or profile of the host country drove the student's choice towards a particular country. The pull factor is whether university qualifications can be recognised, and was seen as the most important issue for their selection of host institution. What are common to Duan's (1997) and Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) models, however, is that both concentrated on influencing factors instead of decision-making models. As well, both lacked diagrams to present their models visually. What is more, both only discussed a few of the six choices in their decision-making models.

Developing Mazzarol and Soutar's decision-making model (2002), Chen (2007a) adopted a more comprehensive one to explain why and how international postgraduates from East Asia selected their overseas higher education. Chen developed a diagram for easy interpretation of the model. It started with choice of academic program choice as the dominant choice. Subsequently, the choice to undertake overseas higher education, at the predisposition stage, was most influenced by personal driving forces. The next was the search/selection/application stage in which country, university and city factors interacted simultaneously. Factors associated with the characteristics of the country, external push-pull factors and significant others all made an impact on the choice of country. When students are searching for institutions, there are four key forces: academic pull factors, administrative pulling factors, external push-pull factors related to environment and location, and the influence of significant others. After international students get their university offers, the decision making then moves into the choice stage in which factors underpinning the search/selection/application stage are revisited and then final decisions are made. This model (Chen, 2007a), however, only reflects international postgraduate students' decision making. Chen's research did not include undergraduate

students, who are the largest proportion of international students. Furthermore, the choice to undertake higher education is missing from Chen's decision-making model.

While following the three steps from Mazzarol and Soutar's decision-making model (2002), Buddhichiwin (2013) identified new factors for Thai international postgraduate students who chose to study in the U.K. The main reason was the shorter time required to complete a master's degree, compared to other host countries. Like Chen's decision-making model (2007a), Buddhichiwin's only presented the decision making of international postgraduate students and not those at other levels of higher education. As well, as in the cases of Duan (1997), and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Buddhichiwin's research was not concerned with the decision-making model but rather with the influencing factors. Additionally, Buddhichiwin only examined three of the six relevant choices to be made by international students.

With the same interest in international postgraduates as Chen (2007a) and Buddhichiwin (2013), Manns and Swift (2016) identified a decision-making model for Chinese international postgraduates enrolling in a U.K. university, although they merely attempted to investigate a decision-making process. The first choice, according to their model, was for a country, and this was influenced by 13 key determinants. The course was the second choice, and the most important forces were "programme suitability to my career" and the "percentage of graduates who get a job within six months of completing their studies" (p. 20). After that, the students showed concern about the university's "canteens, shops and banks" (p. 20). The final choice was the choice of city, which was influenced by the environment. A figure associated with this decision-making model is presented in Manns and Swift's research. Again, however, the focus of this research was only international postgraduates. Furthermore, Manns and Swift did not include the choice to pursue higher education and the choice to go overseas in this model.

Besides the forementioned limitations of these previous decision-making models (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Chen, 2007a; Duan, 1997; Manns & Swift, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), there are other common drawbacks. First, each of them only introduces one single decision-making model. However, based on the statement in the last section that there is usually more than one decision-making process that occurs, their decision-making models also possibly have a few. Second, the interactions among choices, factors and processes were not presented systematically in the existing decision-making models. Some studies have even treated these three elements as separate entities, without considering their connections and relationships. Consequently, this research aimed to present a detailed account of the interactions of these three elements. Third, there were very few diagrams of international student decision-making model presented in these studies, and those that were included were highly complex. A decision-making model, like a decision-making process, is the most useful when it is simplified. To render a decision-making model visually in a diagram is the best approach for explaining it. Hence the intention of my research was to generate simplified diagrams to show the identified international student decision-making models.

The research conducted so far has not been sufficient for understanding the decision-making models of international students. The aim of the current study, therefore, was to bridge this gap through generating more comprehensive decision-making models.

3.7 Conclusion

The review of literature presented here has shown that there is no single and overarching literature-derived framework for choice making that could be used to organise and guide researchers' efforts to develop a comprehensive decision-making model for international students. However, from the key literature on the four core themes of this research: choices, factors, processes and decision-making models, it has been possible to derive such a framework (see Figure 3.2). This framework was used in the current study as a basis for ascertaining a holistic overview of students' decision making, as well as to reveal the mechanisms underlying Chinese international students' decision to undertake courses in a regional Australian university.

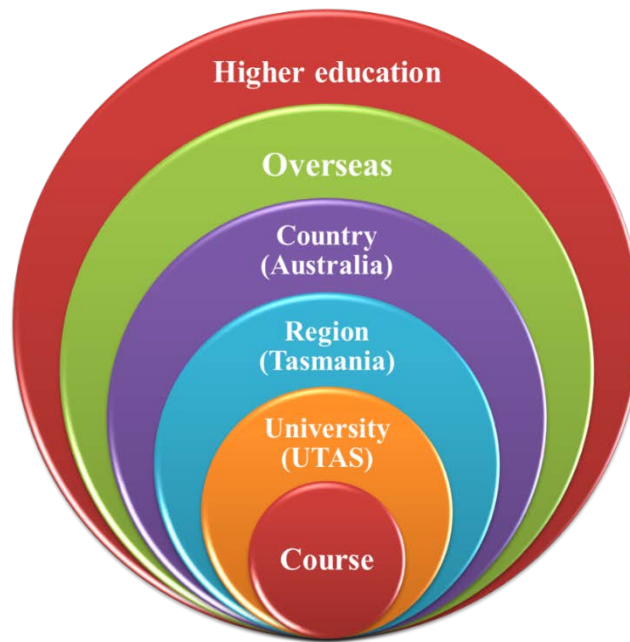


Figure 3.2. A literature-derived framework for making choices.

There are six major choices seen in Figure 3.2, which relate to higher education made by international students. To extend this understanding, as the case in this research, the decision making of Chinese international students for regional Australian higher education also encompasses these six major choices. In this way, this proposed framework ties together these six choices: (1) to engage in higher education, (2) to study overseas, (3) to pick the host country (Australia), (4) to choose the region (Tasmania), (5) to pick the host university (UTAS), and (6) to select the course. Section 3.4 has identified that these six choices are also underpinned by a logical (top-down) hierarchy from the macro level, making the most general choice (to undertake higher education), to the micro level, making the most specific choice (of a particular

course). This tentative decision-making process was considered to be a useful starting point for the study, to be restructured based on data gathered in this research. Another reason for using this framework is that there is more than one decision-making process used by international students, and therefore a logical sequence was considered to be the best approach to test it. The framework does not show factors influencing international students' decision making. This is because the most widely adopted work on the influencing factors, the Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory (2002), was not a good fit for my research. However, a wide range of factors identified in the extant literature as impacting upon international students' intentions to study overseas will be discussed in the results and discussion chapters, Chapters 6–11. This literature-derived framework for making choices offers interpretative and systematic guidance in deriving the decision-making models of Chinese international students and generalised decision-making models in this thesis via intertwining choices, factors and decision-making processes. As explained earlier, the framework was also used as a basis for developing research instruments and to structure the results and discussion chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 4 Method and Research Design

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a preliminary literature review to establish a literature-derived framework for making choices. This chapter will proceed to the next step of this study: the research design and development of the research instruments for data collection. The methods employed to address the research questions will be the focus of this chapter.

The methodology of this research has been mapped out in Figure 4.1. This shows the procedures of the study and connects the research approach, data collection, data, data analysis and results.

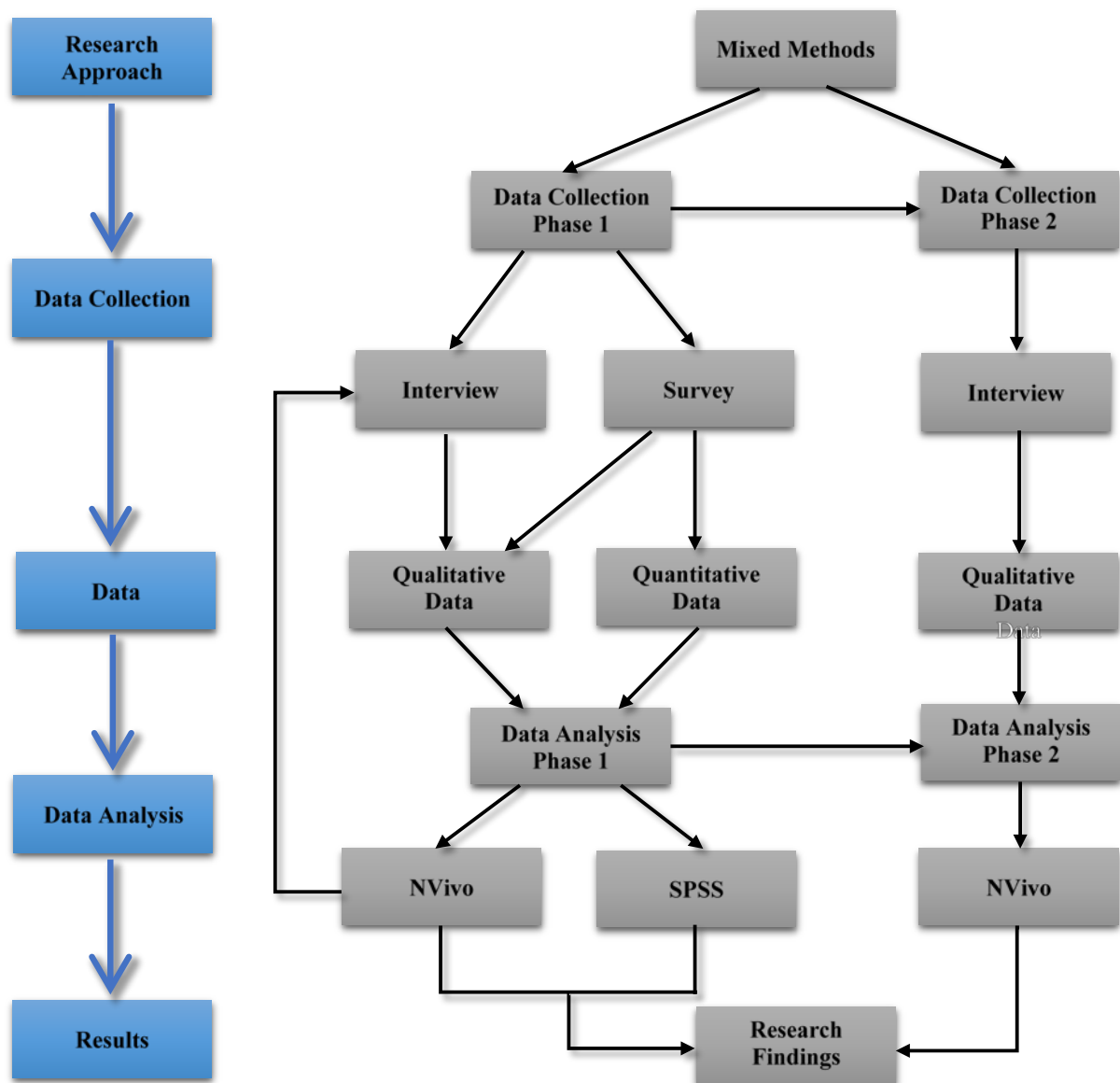


Figure 4.1. Methodology map of the research.

As seen in Figure 4.1, the methodological principles underpinning this study were located within a mixed methods research approach, with qualitative and quantitative methods employed together to gather and analyse the data. The data collection and analysis consisted of two phases. Survey and interview methods were used concurrently in phase one of the data collection.

The survey is the most widely utilised social science data collection technique (Neuman, 2011). In this case, it was the most appropriate data collection method because it matched the exploratory purposes of this research (Babbie, 2017), and it enabled original data to be gathered from a population of more than 800 Chinese international students who were at UTAS,¹ too large a cohort to be observed directly (Babbie, 2017).

There are three fundamental methods when it comes to qualitative data collection: interview, observation and focus groups (Frechtling & Sharp, 1997; Morgan, 1997; Patton, 2002). Observation and focus groups were not suitable here for collecting qualitative data, since the nature of this research was *ex post facto* and so the information on Chinese international students' decisions could not actually be observed. Although focus group can be used to elicit views from participants by asking open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014), it would have been quite challenging to organise a focus group discussion with students who had different timetables because of their diverse courses. Furthermore, focus groups are preferable to gathering responses without group influence factors, but students may find it difficult to elaborate on their decision making in this kind of forum (see section 3.4), and they would be very likely to just agree with others' opinions instead of reflecting on their own decisions. Individual interviews were deemed more suitable to this research since they would enable the conversation to go fairly deep, and more insights could be collected (Babbie, 2017). In this case, as the interviewer, I was able to guide the Chinese international students and give space for them to recall original factors underpinning their decision of regional Australian higher education.

The quantitative survey data collected in phase one were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. NVivo software was used to analyse the interview data and the qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire sections. A systematic grounded theory approach was used. The analysis was continued until no more categories from the interview data were found. Then, building onto these categories, the qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire sections were analysed to see whether there were any new categories. After that, the results coming from both data analysis are integrated. Subsequently, results in the first phase are produced. The data collection of the second phase involved another round of interviews. The collected qualitative data from this phase were also analysed with the help of NVivo. From the systematic grounded theory, theories were formulated by merging and generalising the results which emerged from the two phases.

¹ The data were provided by the UTAS international student advisor at the Launceston campus at the beginning of 2015.

This chapter will give a detailed illustration of this research approach, the design of the research instruments, and the data collection. In terms of the data analysis of this research, only the methods used will be shown in this chapter. Further details of the collected data, the process and the results of the data analysis will be presented in Part B.

This study used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, with the induction aspect being more prevalent. Specifically, this research had adopted mixed methods. That is, the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach both were used in this study but with a greater focus on the qualitative approach. The quantitative approach was primarily deductive, with an emphasis on looking at existing knowledge to conceptualise special situations for predicting and interpreting phenomena. The qualitative method was chiefly inductive in nature, describing and developing an understanding of people's particular situations or experiences in order to develop theories and interpretations (Babbie, 2013; Creswell, 2014). This research began with existing evidence and experience for deductively developing the literature derived framework for making choices and the research instruments. However, its key aim was to derive theories about phenomenon grounded in collected data, and to allow these theories to build throughout the study, which was primarily based on inductive reasoning with the guidance of systematic grounded theory. To place it on an inductive/deductive spectrum (see Figure 4.2), the theory-building process of the research is positioned dominantly at the inductive end, but it also involves some deductive elements. Inductive and deductive arguments related to the structure of the thesis have been expanded in section 2.2 in Chapter 2.



Figure 4.2. The position of this work on the inductive/deductive spectrum.

4.2 The Research Approach

As explained above, mixed methods were adopted as the approach for this research. This approach is well known for allowing multiple pictures to be gained from several different angles (Creswell, 2015). As a third methodological movement, it emerged from the awareness of researchers that the complexity of research problems is beyond simple numbers in a quantitative approach, or words in a qualitative approach (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Within the research field of international student decision-making, it has been found that there is a potential issue in the implementation of a single research approach, in either a qualitative or a quantitative sense. In the existing studies, scholars (e.g. Chapman, 1981) have not been able to give full insight into research situations (Buddhichiwin, 2013; Manns & Swift, 2016). Consequently, mixed methods are now popularised to address research problems in this area (e.g. Bamber, 2014; Chen, 2007a; Liu, 2015; Manns & Swift, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

A mixed-method approach was considered to be the most suitable approach for this research since it draws from the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods, and minimises their disadvantages, thus providing a more complete understanding of the research problem than either method could do by itself (Creswell, 2012, 2015; Frechtling & Sharp, 1997; Johnson & Turner, 2003). To be specific, quantitative results can generate general statistical trends, whilst stories and personal experiences have yielded qualitative results (Creswell, 2015). In this research, the quantitative strand offered an overview, across a large sample, of the general situation of Chinese international student motivations to engage in higher education. If this study had only adopted a quantitative approach, all the elements of decision making and the anecdotes of UTAS individuals would have not been collected to enrich and deepen the research. Likewise, the qualitative approach was used to explore individual factors further and deeper, with a small number of participants (Huxley, 1995). If only a qualitative method had been employed, the findings would not have presented the overall picture of Chinese international students at UTAS but would have been limited to views from a small amount of respondents. In addition, the use of mixed methods facilitated the research validity and credibility by enhancing the integrity of the findings (Bryman, 2006).

This research fell into the category of a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell, 2014), in which the qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed concurrently, to then merge results from these two data sets into an overall interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Data validity and time restrictions were the two major reasons why the convergent mixed methods approach was chosen instead of picking other kinds of mixed methods approaches, particularly the sequential mixed methods approach.

In terms of data validity, international students' decision making probably changes over time due to the impacts of policies and other factors. This is why the quantitative and qualitative data were gathered at the same time. The convergent mixed methods approach was a helpful and valid way to reflect the decision making of Chinese international students who were enrolled at UTAS in a particular semester.

In relation to time restrictions, it would be quite difficult to complete collection and analysis of one set of data only to be then followed by the gathering of another set of data within the four-month period of a semester. If any of the sequential mixed methods approaches had been employed in this research, quantitative and qualitative data would have had to be collected from different semesters, which could have resulted in a validity issue in the research findings.

Another advantage of convergent mixed methods research is that one type of data collection is independent of the results of the other type. It is worth noting that although both the data collection and data analysis of this research had two phases, the approach of this study still belongs to the category of convergent mixed methods design, on the grounds that the first phase, especially in its data collection, was the major and key phase of this research, and the second was supplemented by data gathered in the prior phase.

4.3 Design of the Research Instruments

The instruments for this research were designed before undertaking data collection. There were few existing research instruments designed to explore Chinese international students' decision making about overseas higher education, especially for a regional Australian university. Therefore, the instruments used here to gather first-hand data were designed by me specifically for this study. They were a questionnaire and two interview schedules. The robustness of research instruments is considered the key to quality assurance of a study, so the instruments in this research were designed by following three steps: the initial development, the pilot study, and the finalisation.

4.3.1 Initial Development of Research Instruments

4.3.1.1 Initial development of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was utilised primarily to gather quantitative data in round one of the data collection. The initial questionnaire had two parts. Part A contained six questions and was designed to collect participants' demographic information. Part B made up the main body of the questionnaire and consisted of six questions about factor items, such as why the Chinese students had decided to go to a regional Australian university. These were measured by five-point Likert scales (Likert, 1932). There were also six open-ended questions designed to draw out more information about the influencing factors.

The six choices, derived from or grounded in the literature, were used as the six main scales in Part B of the questionnaire. Each of the six scales had a number of items, which were referred to as factors in the instrument presented to students for completion. These items were derived from or influenced by a number of sources (see Appendix 1), which is common for instrument development (Kember & Ginns, 2012). The literature used to derive the six choices was the major influence, as it discussed the characterisation of the choice in some detail. Numerous informal conversations with fellow international students, mainly Chinese, was informative. Personal experiences also played a part.

Additionally, the questionnaire was kept short, since students are usually reluctant to respond to questionnaires which are thought to be overly long (Kember & Leung, 2009).

It is often quite difficult to substantiate the validity of a questionnaire (Kember & Leung, 2009; Neuman, 2011). The derivation of the questionnaire from the literature provided a measure of face and content validity. The face validity of the items in Part B was thus ensured by the literature reviewed. The other validation strategy implemented was the careful checking of every item in the questionnaire by the researcher to make sure that each reflected a good measure of a construct, and made sense for potential survey respondents. The content validity of the questionnaire was tested and enhanced in the pilot study, which will be outlined in section 4.3.2.

4.3.1.2 Initial development of the interview schedules

Two interview schedules were employed to collect the qualitative data in phases one and two of the study, respectively. The questionnaire and both interview schedules were initially developed in English. The interview schedules were translated into Chinese later on. Chinese was the language used in the interviews in both phase one and phase two, since the interviewees were all Chinese, and could thus express their thoughts and opinions more clearly and more comprehensively in their own first language.

The interview questions for the first round of data collection were based on the six choices outlined in the literature-derived framework, which were originally derived from the reviewed literature. The same concepts were asked during the quantitative and qualitative data collection in the first phase. The interviews allowed inferences to be made directly about the participants' views by encouraging them to open up during the conversations (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006; Kvale, 1996). This was very different from the data collected via the questionnaire, where the focus was to determine the frequencies of different responses. Particularly in the interview schedule for phase one, open-ended questions were designed to allow the interviewees to provide specific details and explore their thoughts about factors influencing their decision making. They could also provide information that could not be collected in the questionnaire.

The questions presented in the interview schedule for the second phase of data collection were designed to achieve the second objective of this research (see section 1.4). Those questions were from preliminary conversations with Chinese international students. In order to explore their perceptions, the majority of the questions presented in this phase of the interview were also open-ended.

4.3.2 Pilot Study

After formulating the initial version of the research instruments, a pilot study was undertaken to ensure the clarity and feasibility of items and questions and to guide adjustments needed to enable the participants to understand them better (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Also, the validity of this research was tested and then strengthened during the pilot study (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

All three original research instruments designed for the two phases of data collection, the information sheet, and the consent form were given to some Chinese international students at UTAS, international Ph.D. colleagues in the Faculty of Education at UTAS, my supervisors, and a UTAS student learning adviser to be checked. The supervisors and the student learning adviser had extensive experience with international students. To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, these groups as experts in this field were the best choice for a pilot study, based on the suggestion of Arora and Stoner (1995). These groups were invited to comment on the drafts of the research instruments, the information sheet and the consent form in terms of

their content, language and layout, and then to provide suggestions for amendments. Constructive comments were adopted to adjust some parts of the materials.

The modified research instruments were then pretested with a small group of Chinese international students at UTAS who were typical of the intended target group. Three students were selected for this on the basis of convenience. They were invited to be involved in the pilot survey and interview. The procedures were kept similar to those intended for the main study. The students were given the information sheet and asked to sign the consent form. They were then invited to complete the written questionnaire, after which they were asked to give feedback on its structure and content. Thus, the content validity of the questionnaire was enhanced further. After the survey, pilot interviews were conducted in Chinese with each of the students to test the interview schedules for phases one and two. After the interview, the students were asked to describe any difficulties they had encountered in understanding or answering the questions. The research instruments were refined on the basis of their suggestions.

The positive feedback from the pilot study suggested that all three research instruments were well designed. It was not considered necessary to adjust the interview schedules, and no great changes to the questionnaire were required. Minor changes in the questionnaire included the adjustment of some wording, and the inclusion of the research project title, as well as minor modifications to the instructions at the beginning of the questionnaire. The pilot study was effective in helping to enhance the clarity of statements and structures of the questionnaire.

The finalised research instruments are included in Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

4.4 Data Collection

4.4.1 Data Collection Methods

As described above, this was a mixed methods study. The data collection method adopted in the quantitative stage was in the form of a survey, including an online survey and a paper survey; whilst a semi-structured interview was employed as the main method for the qualitative data collection stage. The purpose of the survey was to provide a general overview of the Chinese international students' decision making when considering study in a regional Australian university, while the interview was used to explore individuals' experiences further and more deeply. The combination of information collected from these two methods can present an overall picture of Chinese international student decision-making when selecting overseas higher education.

4.4.1.1 The quantitative data collection method

There were two methods of administering the survey, online and by paper copy. A link to the Qualtrics survey was sent to the UTAS email addresses of all Chinese international students, with the covering information and an invitation to complete it. However, after two months, the

response rate to the online survey was still low so, based on an amendment approved by the Ethics Committee, paper questionnaires were handed to Chinese international students in classrooms at UTAS.

4.4.1.2 The qualitative data collection method

This research adopted the format of semi-structured interviews. The open-ended questions were used to guide the interviewee with flexibility, allowing the interviewee and the interviewer to diverge to a more in-depth probing of motivations and views associated with the research topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

The interviews in the first phase of this investigation were conducted face-to-face. This format was considered to be most effective for establishing rapport, especially in preparation for the follow-up interview in the second stage of data collection. Additionally, the face-to-face approach was adopted in order to maximise the response rate (Liu, 2015). It also enabled the researcher to observe visual aids and nonverbal communication in an effort to achieve a better result for the research (Neuman, 2011).

In the second phase the interviews were conducted by telephone or online calls. This was necessary because the participants in this round were dispersed geographically and unable to come to a face-to-face interview (Creswell, 2012) since they had already graduated from UTAS.

4.4.2 Case, Sampling and Participants

This research was a case study of UTAS. The selection of UTAS rather than another regional Australian university was in order to investigate the situation of Chinese international students at this university since their total number is small. Also, UTAS is the only university in the state of Tasmania, hence the case study in effect became one of the whole state. Additionally, as the researcher was studying at UTAS it was convenient to access both participants and information about the university. The case study focused on Chinese international students because they formed the largest proportion of the international student body in UTAS (see section 1.3). Consequently, this cohort could be considered as the best representation of all UTAS international students, which could allow for some generalisation from the case to a larger international student population.

The population for this case study encompassed all undergraduate and postgraduate international students from the People's Republic of China, including mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, at one of the three UTAS Tasmanian campuses (Hobart, Launceston or Cradle Coast) in semester one, 2015. The population size was 835, according to data provided by a UTAS international student advisor at the Launceston campus in April, 2015. This population excluded Chinese international students at the Sydney campus of UTAS, and offshore Chinese students. The Sydney campus is a metropolitan campus, not in a regional context, and was thus excluded as the students' decisions to study there could be different from the ones applied to studying at the regional campuses. The offshore Chinese students were

excluded because they did not fit the definition of Chinese international students for this research (see section 1.5.1).

This study involved two phases of data collection. Phase one was associated with research objective one, concerning Chinese international students' pre-departure decisions to enrol in a regional Australian university. For the first round of the data collection, it was quite feasible to survey the whole population instead of a sample, since the actual population size of 835 was quite small. Opinions from all Chinese international students at UTAS best demonstrate the comprehensive reasons why they made their decision to receive higher education at UTAS. Hence, the whole population was invited to take part in the survey.

For the interview in the first phase of the data gathering it was necessary to select a sample as it was not feasible to interview all members of the population. Thus, a purposeful sampling strategy was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Those members of the population who were due to graduate at the end of semester one, 2015 were invited to participate in the interview. The reason for choosing this sample for the qualitative stage of phase one of the data collection was because it allowed for the participants to be interviewed a second time after their graduation from UTAS, still within the timeframe available for the study. Phase two of the data collection was designed to achieve the second research objective (to explore post-sojourn satisfaction), and the second round of interviews was conducted between eight and ten months after the students' graduation. The distribution of the interviewees chosen was reasonably consistent with the spread of demographics of graduating Chinese international students at UTAS, especially in terms of genders, campuses, faculties and degree levels.

Eventually, in phase one of data collection 501 responses were received, including 319 online and 182 on paper. The response rate was 60.0% (501/835), which was fairly good (Babbie, 2013). After eliminating incomplete and inappropriate responses (e.g., duplicates), the total of usable responses was 459. There were 23 participants involved in the first round of interviews, of whom 21 followed up to take part in the interview in phase two of the data collection process.

4.4.3 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures of this study are presented visually in Figure 4.3, which were distilled from Figure 4.1 (see section 4.1).

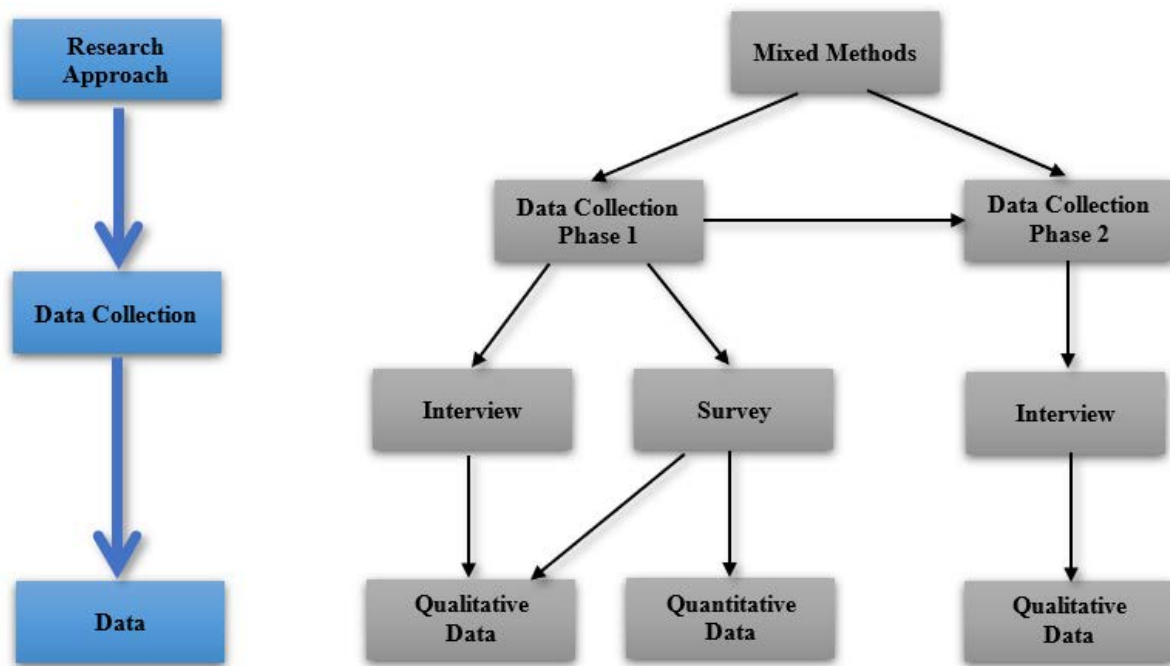


Figure 4.3. Methodology map of the data collection.

As explained above, there were two data collection phases (see Figure 4.3), corresponding to the time frames associated respectively with the two research objectives. The first stage of data gathering was conducted during semester one in 2015, in the form of survey and interview, in order to explore Chinese international student decision-making when selecting a regional Australian university. In other words, it was to resolve research questions belonging to the first research objective. From the eighth month to the 10th month after the Chinese international students graduated from UTAS, the second phase of the investigation was undertaken via interview. Data collection in this phase was devoted to uncovering the perceptions of Chinese international student experiences of a regional Australian university after their graduation, and to achieve the second research objective. It was also to resolve relevant research questions.

4.4.3.1 Phase one

At the beginning of semester one 2015, an international student advisor at the Launceston campus of UTAS was requested to send invitation letters to participate in the online survey to the UTAS email addresses of all members of the population. A separate invitation was sent to the whole population to invite students to participate in the interview. These emails were sent by the UTAS international student advisor rather than the researcher for privacy reasons. Both invitations were written in Chinese because it was believed it would be easier to catch the students' attention this way, so they would be more willing to take part in the investigation.

(1) Survey

The online survey recruitment letter included a link to the anonymous Qualtrics survey, and an information sheet. If students wanted to take part in the survey, they just needed to click on the online survey link in the recruitment email. The online questionnaire was accessible for two months. Responses were also collected by Qualtrics. In an effort to improve the response rate, the UTAS international student advisor helped me to send three reminder emails to the whole population, 10, 20 and 25 days after the survey was originally distributed. After two months, the response rate for the online survey was still low, so based on an amendment approved by the Ethics Committee, paper copies of the questionnaire and information sheet were distributed to Chinese international students in several UTAS classes in which large proportions of Chinese international students were enrolled, such as in the Master of Professional Accounting program. The distribution of hard copies of the questionnaire dramatically increased the response rate. The questionnaire data collection process was completed by the end of semester one, 2015.

(2) Interview

The interview recruitment email was also sent to the whole population, rather than the sample, since the list of graduating Chinese international students was unknown at that time. However, it was explained clearly in the interview recruitment email that it was only the students who were about to graduate at the end of semester 1, 2015 who would be invited to participate. The interview recruitment email included basic information about this research and the interview schedule. Students who were expecting to graduate emailed me to express their willingness to take part in this semi-structured interview. The interviews were organised at the Hobart and Launceston campuses of UTAS.

Prior to the interviews, the participants were provided with an information sheet that gave details about the two phases of interview data collection. All participants signed the consent form, agreeing to take part in the interview in this phase. On average interviews lasted one to two hours. The language used in the interview was Mandarin, which was the native language of all the students but one from Hong Kong. However, this student was highly proficient in Mandarin and was comfortable to be interviewed in this language.

The interviews were recorded by digital voice recorder with the permission of the participants, and were transcribed later. During the interviews, notes were taken. These notes were used later to facilitate the identification of themes and categories in the data analysis process. At the end of their interviews, the students were asked about their willingness to take part in the next interview of phase two. If they wanted to participate, the consent form for the second-phase interview was then signed, since the interviews were not going to be conducted in a face-to-face format. Their personal contact details were also collected, such as email address, phone number, or Wechat number,¹ since in the next interview their UTAS email address might no longer be available due to graduation.

¹ Wechat is the most popular and convenient voice chat application in China.

The recruitment of interviewees and undertaking of interviews continued until the point of saturation when no more new categories were generated from the data. Eventually, 23 face-to-face individual interviews were conducted within semester one of 2015.

4.4.3.2 Phase two

The interviews were the only method used in phase two of the data collection. Only one form of data, qualitative data was gathered during these interviews (see Figure 4.3).

In the eighth month after the Chinese international students graduated from UTAS, an invitation was sent, again in Chinese, to all 23 first-round interviewees by email, mobile phone message or Wechat message. It included the interview schedule for phase two of the data collection. It was difficult, if not practically impossible, to carry out face-to-face interviews because the participants had already graduated from UTAS. The interviews in this phase were conducted via phone call or Wechat voice call. Of the 23 first-phase interviewees, 21 were involved in the interviews of round two. One of the original 23 did not reply to the invitation, and another had withdrawn from UTAS enrolment, which led her to being not eligible to be an interviewee in this phase, since she could not reflect on post-sojourn perceptions. These interviews were carried out from the eighth to the 10th month after graduation. Each interview was completed within 20-30 minutes, in Mandarin. They were recorded by digital voice recorder with the permission of the interviewees. During the interviews, notes were taken.

4.5 Data Analysis Methods

The data in this research were in two forms: quantitative data obtained from the online survey and the paper survey, and qualitative data which was obtained mostly from the two phases of interviews and from the open-ended section of the survey. The quantitative data were analysed utilising features of SPSS software version 24, such as Frequencies and the Reliability Analysis. NVivo software version 10 was the platform used to analyse the qualitative data using systematic grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This section will only present methods adopted in the data analysis stages of the research. Details of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis will be explained further in Parts B and C.

4.5.1 The Quantitative Data Analysis Methods

The Frequencies and Reliability Analysis functions of SPSS were used to analyse the quantitative data. The Frequencies is a univariate analysis used to obtain descriptive statistics for one variable, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while the Reliability Analysis deals with multiple variables (Pallant, 2013), such as the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test.

The Frequencies function was run to provide information on the distribution and frequency of demographic information, as well as scaled items, by generating frequency tables and charts.

The Frequencies of demographic information and scaled items will be presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 and Chapters 6–11 will present the Frequencies of respective scaled items. The measures of the Frequencies adopted in this research encompassed frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Frequency is not only useful for nominal variables but also for interval variables.¹ In this research, frequencies and percentages were generated for the respondents' biographic information and scaled items. Means were calculated to identify the central tendencies of the importance levels of each factor. Standard deviations indicated the spread of the responses about the importance of factors.

The Reliability Analysis was utilised to test whether the scales in the questionnaire were reliable (Pallant, 2013). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient is one of the most commonly adopted indicators to examine the internal consistency of scaled items (Pallant, 2013). It tests whether the items are all measuring the same underlying construct (Pallant, 2013), or if items in the questionnaire are related to each other. Thus, in this research, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient made a contribution to ensuring the reliability of the scales within the questionnaire rather than to producing any direct research results. The details of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for scales in this questionnaire will be elaborated on in Chapter 5.

4.5.2 The Qualitative Data Analysis Method

Systematic grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998) was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered from the audio recordings of the interviews in the two phases of this investigation, and from the open-ended section of the questionnaires in phase one, by way of NVivo software.

The principle of grounded theory fits well this research. That is, it is an inductive approach, and provides a general framework for theories to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) especially when a theory is not available to explain the process, or when existing theories are incomplete in addressing potentially valuable variables or categories within the interest of a study (Charmaz, 2014). Due to the limited relevant research available, my study was trying to find an inductive way, without hypotheses, to derive a logic paradigm and a visual picture of the theories from the gathered data.

Compared with two other grounded theories, that is, emerging grounded theory (Glaser, 1992) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), systematic grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) was considered to be the most appropriate choice for this study. Systematic grounded theory seeks to systematically generate a theory which explains a process or an interaction on a topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The focus of this study was a reflection of Chinese international students' decision making when choosing overseas higher education. Also, in order to derive theories, this research followed the constant comparative method

¹ Likert scales were treated as interval variables in SPSS tests in this research, since the distance between the values of each Likert scale (such as "very important" and "important") was meaningful.

(Corbin & Strauss, 2015) together with “theoretical sampling” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 201) in the process of qualitative data gathering and analysis in systematic grounded theory approach. The analysis of qualitative data in this research followed the three steps of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding under the methodological guidance of systematic grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Systematic grounded theory is as a design widely utilised in educational research like this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Based on the above reasons, this research adopted systematic grounded theory to analyse and interpret the gathered qualitative data. The implementation of systematic grounded theory to analyse the qualitative data will be discussed further in Parts B and C.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the methods underpinning this study, as well as an overview of the research design. These have provided the methodological foundation on which the actual research process was built in order to achieve the research objectives.

PART B: ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 Macro-Level Analysis of the Quantitative and Qualitative Data

5.1 Introduction

Part A of this thesis has consisted of four chapters which provide a comprehensive overview of this study. Part B from here on is the main part of the thesis and will concentrate on analysing the collected data and presenting results and discussion.

Inspired by the procedures of systematic grounded theory which chiefly guides this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), this research will put forward the idea that the process of writing itself is also a vital part of data analysis in research, and only at the completion of writing is the end of data analysis actually achieved. On the basis of this, this chapter will focus on the macro level, describing the procedures used to analyse the gathered data and showing the preliminary results of data analysis. The micro level of data analysis, in other words, the details of the data analysis, the final results, and the resulting interpretation will be elaborated on in the results and discussion chapters, which is the remains of Part B and will also continue on in Part C.

The presentation of this chapter will follow the sequence of data analysis carried out. Data analysis from phase one will be delineated in section 5.2, followed by the discussion of the phase-two data analysis, and then the convergence of results from two phases of data analysis will be given in section 5.3.

5.2 Data Analysis in Phase One

This section focuses on phase-one data analysis of this research, which encompasses three significant steps, the quantitative and then qualitative data analysis as well as the consolidation of preliminary results from both data analyses. These will be given respectively in sections 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3. This research project utilises a convergent mixed methods approach, and therefore both survey and interview data were gathered concurrently. It is worth noting however that the commencement of analysis of the quantitative data from the survey closely followed the completion of the survey data gathering. But the collection and the analysis of interview data was mixed into the theoretical sampling under the guidance of systematic grounded theory. That is, the analysis of the interview data started after the collection of a few interviews, and then gathering of the interview data was followed by the analysis. The qualitative data from the survey were to be integrated with the interview data in the procedure of selective coding of qualitative data analysis, and was also guided by systematic grounded theory. More detailed information will be given for this in section 5.2.2.

5.2.1 Quantitative Data Analysis in Phase One

Quantitative data analysis was conducted after the completion of survey data collection. Responses gathered from online and paper questionnaires were tested together using SPSS. All data gathered from Qualtrics was imported into SPSS. Data collected from the hard copies was entered manually into SPSS. Five-point Likert scales were employed to explore the importance level of all factors for each choice in Chinese international student decision making. In SPSS, “very important” was defined as value 5, and “important” was assigned value 4. Value 3 corresponded to “unimportant”, value 2 corresponded to “very unimportant”, and value 1 was assigned to “never considered”. After assigning values to the variables, the data in SPSS were screened and cleaned. Eventually, tests in SPSS were run in order to address the research questions.

In this section, the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents gathered from Part A of the questionnaire will be analysed first. Then reliability of the scales within the questionnaire will be measured. Lastly, this section will present the frequencies analysis of all quantitative data from Part B of the questionnaire in terms of frequency, mean and standard deviation.

5.2.1.1 Demographics of survey respondents

The cohort of survey respondents was a good representation of the whole population thanks to the very high response rate of the questionnaires at 60.0% (501/835). Invalid responses were from respondents of the online questionnaire who only filled in the demographic questions but ignored the five-point Likert scales questions. After the deletion of invalid responses, the response rate still remained at 55.0% (459/835). Table 5.1 provides an overall summary of the demographic characteristics of survey respondents for this research, in terms of gender, age, region of origin, faculty and degree level. This table indicates that the demographics of survey respondents was in alignment with the profile of the population, which powerfully reinforces the point that the group of survey respondents was fully representative of the entire population in general.

Table 5.1

Demographics of Survey Respondents

Demographics		Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	230	50.1%
	Male	229	49.9%
Age	19	9	2.0%
	20-24	191	41.6%
	25-29	190	41.4%
	30-34	52	11.3%
	35-39	14	3.1%
	40-49	2	0.4%

Demographics		Number	Percentage
	50-59	1	0.2%
Region of origin	South China	233	50.8%
	North China	196	42.7%
	Northwest China	13	2.8%
	Qinghai-Tibet	1	0.2%
	Missing	16	3.5%
Faculty	Tasmanian School of Business & Economics (TSBE)	238	51.9%
	Science, Engineering & Technology (SET)	97	21.1%
	Australian Maritime College (AMC)	45	9.8%
	Health	40	8.7%
	Arts	19	4.1%
	Education	18	3.9%
	Law	2	0.4%
Degree level	Bachelor	167	36.4%
	Master	235	51.2%
	Doctor	55	12.0%
	Others	1	0.2%
	Missing	1	0.2%

This table presents the profile of 459 UTAS Chinese international students whose responses were used in this research.

The proportion of male to female respondents was almost equal (50.1% females, males 49.9%). This suggests that there is an even opportunity to pursue overseas higher education for both males and females from China. In this way a common misconception of male privilege in China is being challenged particularly through education. It is notable though, that the majority of Western university students are female.

Most of the students were of an age between 20-34 (94.3%). This ties in with the fact that many Chinese people prefer to receive higher education in their 20s and early 30s. Among them, the largest cohort was aged between 25-34 years (52.7%), most of which came to UTAS to undertake a master's degree (51.2%). In addition, no respondents were younger than 19 years old because the graduation age for secondary students is usually 18 years old in China.

The largest proportion of survey respondents was from South China (50.8%), and the second largest were from the North of China (42.7%). This aligns with the ongoing trend for Chinese people studying abroad to come from South China. South China, especially the southeast coast areas of China, is wealthy, so people are more likely to be able to afford overseas study costs (Stafford, 2010). However, the percentage of respondents from North China was large as well (42.7%), which is probably a new overseas study trend in China. Of all the respondents, only

3.0% were from Northwest China and Qinghai-Tibet. To be specific, the top five provinces, Special Administrative Regions (SARs)¹ or municipalities² from which the survey respondents originated were Shandong (North China), Shanghai (South China),³ Jiangsu (South China), Anhui (South China), and Liaoning (North China), which accounted for 41.0% of all survey respondents. Shanghai, Beijing,⁴ Qingdao (Shandong province), Chengdu (Sichuan province) were the top four cities in this survey. Through this we can see that survey participants came from a broad range of provinces in China, although the majority of them were from SARs, municipalities, or provincial capitals of China. This is not a surprising outcome since these areas comprise the most wealth and have the highest population density (Stafford, 2010).

In terms of faculty distribution, the notable preference for the survey respondents was TSBE in which more than half of all (51.9%) were studying. The second largest cohort was in SET (21.1%). The third most represented faculty was AMC (9.8%). These three groups accounted for 82.8% of all Chinese international students at UTAS. This distribution is in line with the overall enrolments for Chinese international students at UTAS (see Figure 1.5). The possible reasons why a large number of Chinese international students were enrolled in these three faculties included immigration prospects, joint education programs, specialist courses and ease of courses, which will be further elaborated on in Chapters 10 and 11.

As for degree distribution, the largest questionnaire responses were from those undertaking master's degree programs (51.2%). Next was bachelor's degree courses (36.4%). It seems reasonable that there would be a large cohort enrolled in master's degree courses rather than bachelor's degree programs for the following reasons: It saves time compared to undertaking a master's degree in China (see section 7.10.2), it offers future employment prospects (see sections 7.10.3 and 11.5), it reflects the availability of scholarships (see section 10.2.2), immigration prospects (see section 11.3), and is due to the perceived ease of some of the available courses (see section 11.7) and so on.

5.2.1.2 Reliability analysis

The reliabilities of the scales within the questionnaire were checked using Cronbach's alpha coefficient values in the Reliability Analysis of SPSS. The Reliability Analysis is used to ensure that a set of items in the questionnaire form reliable scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficient gives a measure of the internal consistency with which items under each scale measure a single construct (Miller, 1995).

The questionnaire utilised in this research has six scales: "the factors why you chose to progress to higher education" (higher education), "the factors why you chose to study overseas" (overseas), "the reasons why you picked Australia as your study destination" (Australia), "the

¹ The SARs are one type of provincial-level administrative division of China.

² Municipalities have the same rank as provinces in China although they are cities.

³ Shanghai is one of the municipalities of China.

⁴ Beijing is one of the municipalities of China.

reasons why you came to Tasmania for study” (Tasmania), “the reasons why you selected to study at UTAS” (UTAS), and “the reasons why you chose to study your current course” (course).

Cronbach’s alpha coefficient can range from 0 to 1, with 0 representing scales that are not reliable and 1 representing absolutely reliable scales in a questionnaire (Bolarinwa, 2015). According to DeVellis (2012), and Briggs and Cheek (1986), the score of a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of a scale should be higher than .7. If the alpha value is lower than .7, some items under this scale which exert substantially impact on the total alpha value may need to be removed from the questionnaire in order to improve the reliability of the scale.

Table 5.2 shows Cronbach’s alpha coefficient scores for scales within the questionnaire. The values of alpha for these six scales ranged from .702 to .849. All values comfortably exceeded .7, which means that all six scales have high internal consistency and are considered reliable.

Table 5.2

Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient for Scales Within the Questionnaire

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach’s alpha
Higher education	7	.702
Overseas	8	.769
Australia	10	.826
Tasmania	8	.849
UTAS	7	.796
Course	8	.779

In addition, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient score is sensitive to the number of items in a scale, so if a scale has fewer than 10 items, the value of the alpha could be quite low (Pallant, 2016). In this questionnaire, only one scale has 10 items, and all other scales have less than 10 items, which can be seen in the second column in Table 5.2. A design like this, with a small number of items makes the students more likely to respond to the questionnaire (see Appendix 2). Fortunately, the output of values of alpha for all six scales shows that no scores are lower than .7, which suggests that there is quite a strong relationship among the items for each scale.

Hence, all 48 items under these six scales in this questionnaire can be reported as part of the results for this research, and no items need to be deleted. It is also appropriate to report values for scales as well as the items.

5.2.1.3 Frequencies of scaled items in the survey

This section outlines the pattern of all 48 factors listed on the questionnaire as influencing the six main choices that occur in Chinese international student decision making. Frequencies of

these scaled items was run in SPSS by presenting frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of each factor in order to identify the degree of importance for each choice.

The descriptive statistics summary of the survey data for all six choices is shown in Table 5.3. In order to develop a better understanding of convergent mixed methods through seamlessly integrated quantitative data and qualitative data, this table will be broken down on the basis of the six choices, and presented in the results and discussion chapters, Chapters 6–11, where the interpretation of all 48 factors will be given.

Table 5.3

Descriptive Statistics Summary of the Survey Data for All Six Choices¹

Choice	Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
Higher Education								
	Gaining knowledge	4.32	0.760	44.0 %	48.8 %	4.8 %	0.4 %	2.0 %
	Future employment prospects	4.34	0.831	48.8 %	41.6 %	6.3 %	0.9 %	2.4 %
	Improving the quality of life	4.14	0.951	40.1 %	43.6 %	10.9 %	1.5 %	3.9 %
	Broadening horizons	4.18	0.885	39.9 %	46 %	9.4 %	2.2 %	2.6 %
	Self-actualisation	4.03	0.992	33.8 %	47.5 %	12.2 %	1.3 %	5.2 %
	Chinese tradition	2.99	1.271	12.4 %	23.3 %	34.9 %	9.8 %	19.6 %
	Pressure from parents/teachers/friends	2.92	1.300	11.1 %	25.3 %	29.4 %	12.4 %	21.8 %
Overseas								
	Higher quality education compared with China	3.99	1.014	32.9 %	45.3 %	15.3 %	0.9 %	5.7 %
	Difficulty gaining entry into Chinese higher education	2.91	1.357	13.1 %	23.5 %	29.2 %	9.4 %	24.8 %

¹ SD = Standard Deviation; VI = Very Important; I = Important; UI = Unimportant; VUI = Very Unimportant; NC = Never Considered.

Choice	Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
	Improving English	4.27	0.862	44.9 %	43.6 %	7.6 %	1.3 %	2.6 %
	Learning to be independent	3.61	1.241	25.3 %	38.6 %	20.0 %	4.4 %	11.8 %
	Seeking freedom	3.36	1.319	23.3 %	26.1 %	29.6 %	5.4 %	15.5 %
	Gaining international/intercultural experience	4.20	0.852	39.2 %	48.4 %	9.2 %	0.2 %	3.1 %
	Following the trend to study overseas	2.81	1.276	9.6 %	21.1 %	34.0 %	11.5 %	23.7 %
	Raising status	3.41	1.124	14.2 %	38.6 %	32.2 %	4.1 %	10.9 %
Australia								
	Easy to know about Australia or Australian higher education in China	3.56	1.040	13.7 %	47.5 %	27.9 %	2.4 %	8.5 %
	Good reputation for higher education in the world	3.67	0.973	14.2 %	53.6 %	23.7 %	1.7 %	6.8 %
	An English-speaking country	4.18	0.758	34.0 %	53.8 %	9.6 %	1.3 %	1.3 %
	Future immigration opportunity	3.78	1.156	30.5 %	37.5 %	19.6 %	4.8 %	7.6 %
	Environmental considerations like climate, lifestyle	4.04	0.971	34.9 %	44.9 %	13.7 %	2.6 %	3.9 %
	Parents/relatives/a n education agent/friends recommended it	3.45	1.231	20.9 %	33.3 %	28.3 %	5.0 %	12.4 %
	Family/relatives/ friends are living/studying in Australia	2.72	1.447	14.8 %	16.8 %	27.2 %	8.1 %	33.1 %
	A good place to travel	3.56	1.162	21.6 %	37.3 %	26.8 %	4.8 %	9.6 %

Choice	Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
	Quick and easy student visa application process	3.65	1.116	22.0 %	41.2 %	25.1 %	3.3 %	8.5 %
	Safety and low racial discrimination	3.86	1.072	29.4 %	42.5 %	18.5 %	3.5 %	6.1 %
Tasmania								
	Good study environment	4.04	1.032	36.6 %	43.2 %	13.2 %	1.3 %	5.7 %
	Natural environment	3.85	1.130	30.5 %	42.1 %	17.3 %	1.8 %	8.3 %
	Low living expenses	3.82	1.106	28.5 %	41.9 %	20.0 %	2.0 %	7.7 %
	Easier to immigrate to compared with other Australian states	3.54	1.278	25.4 %	33.6 %	23.7 %	4.2 %	13.2 %
	Safety	3.74	1.208	28.1 %	41.9 %	17.3 %	1.5 %	11.2 %
	No large Chinese community	3.55	1.301	27.9 %	30.9 %	23.2 %	4.8 %	13.2 %
	Relaxing lifestyle	3.71	1.178	25.2 %	44.1 %	18.4 %	1.5 %	10.7 %
	A good place to travel	3.46	1.238	20.8 %	34.4 %	27.4 %	4.4 %	12.9 %
UTAS								
	University reputation/ranking	3.46	1.099	12.3 %	46.7 %	27.0 %	3.3 %	10.7 %
	Low tuition costs	3.94	1.038	31.6 %	44.3 %	16.2 %	2.2 %	5.7 %
	Availability of scholarships	3.70	1.205	27.4 %	38.8 %	20.4 %	2.9 %	10.5 %
	Accepting transfer credits	3.19	1.328	15.8 %	31.6 %	28.9 %	3.3 %	20.4 %
	Parents/relatives/and education agent/friends recommended it	3.16	1.345	15.1 %	33.3 %	25.4 %	5.0 %	21.1 %
	The qualification is recognised in China	3.35	1.263	17.1 %	36.2 %	26.3 %	5.0 %	15.4 %

Choice	Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
	Easier/faster to get an offer of enrolment compared to other Australian universities	3.67	1.128	23.2 %	40.6 %	24.6 %	2.9 %	8.8 %
Course								
	My previous university has this joint education program with UTAS	3.14	1.536	25.0 %	23.2 %	20.4 %	3.7 %	27.6 %
	Course reputation	3.41	1.219	16.2 %	39.9 %	26.5 %	3.1 %	14.3 %
	High employment rate of graduates from this course	3.41	1.258	18.9 %	36.6 %	26.3 %	3.3 %	14.9 %
	Parents/relatives/a n education agent/friends recommended it	3.21	1.320	15.8 %	33.1 %	27.4 %	4.2 %	19.5 %
	Easy to graduate from	3.04	1.279	11.4 %	28.5 %	33.3 %	5.9 %	20.8 %
	Future immigration opportunity	3.61	1.296	28.5 %	34.9 %	19.1 %	4.6 %	12.9 %
	Promotion from a previous/current job	3.23	1.324	17.1 %	31.6 %	28.1 %	4.2 %	19.1 %
	Personal interest	3.89	1.085	31.1 %	42.3 %	17.5 %	2.2 %	6.8 %

5.2.2 Qualitative Data Analysis in Phase One

In phase one, a total of 23 students took part in the individual interviews. The cohort consisted of 13 males and 10 females. Their ages ranged from 22 to 32 years. Of them, 14 came from North China, eight from South China, while the hometown of one interviewee was in Northwest China. 13 interviewees were studying at the Hobart campus while 10 were located in Launceston. Seven of them were undertaking courses in TSBE, and an equal number were studying in SET. Five interviewees were enrolled at AMC, and three in Education. One student was from the Faculty of Arts. Interviewee degree distributions were: 11 enrolled in bachelor's

degree programs, nine undertaking master's degree courses, and three doctoral candidates. The distribution of the interviewees shows an alignment with the entire population.

Analysing the qualitative data in phase one was a complicated process involving various steps which can be seen in Figure 5.1. It followed the rationale and procedures of systematic grounded theory with an inductive approach. There was no clear distinction between interview data collection and analysis in this phase, since theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was utilised under the guidance of systematic grounded theory in order to “maximise opportunities to discover variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 201). Specifically, the process of gathering and analysis of interview data in this research formed a zigzag pattern: that is, accessing information in the interviews, analysing it, returning to collect more data, analysing that, and so on (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Initially, the first 10 interviews were carried out, and each interview lasted one to two hours on average. After that, qualitative data analysis in phase one commenced. All 10 interviews were conducted in Mandarin.

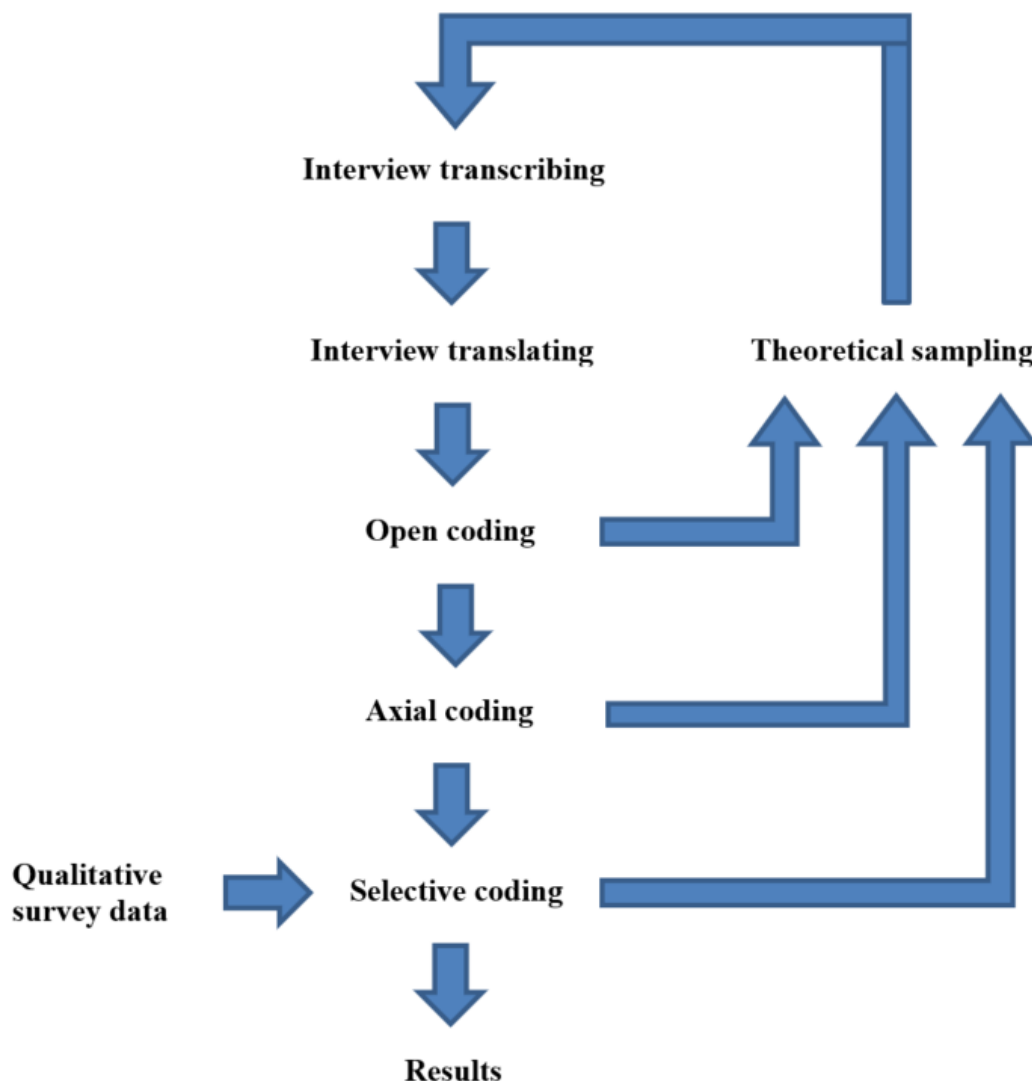


Figure 5.1. The procedure of the qualitative data analysis in phase one.

I took the triple role of researcher, transcriber and translator during this cross-language data analysis process. Considering my language identity, being a Chinese-speaking bilingual made me proficient in Chinese and English. When it comes to my cultural identity, as a student from the mainland China and undertaking higher education in Australia, I demonstrated that I am both an insider and outsider of Chinese culture. Also, I had the best understanding of the sense of this study as a designer as well as investigator of this research. Based on above reasons, the best candidate in transcribing and translating these interviews was me.

The quality and validity of the data transcription and translation could have significant implications on the accuracy of the research findings. As literature (e.g. Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009) suggested, in the data analysis stage, researchers need to engage with meanings and discourses to generate accurate and valid transcripts and translations. Therefore, in the beginning of the data analysis, I transcribed verbatim all 10 interview records into a Chinese textual format in Word files, and then translated them into English. These transcription and translation were in well processes. I checked their quality during the procedure. It had been confirmed that these transcripts and translations were accurate and appropriate.

Member checking was a significant follow-up step in establishing the trustworthiness of the transcripts and translations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, long transcripts and translations from entire interviews would increase the reluctance by interviewees to do member checking. So the whole transcripts and translations would not be checked. Instead, interviewees were provided with the quotations for checking their validity and accuracy. Quotations would be identified and semi-confirmed at the end of the data analysis process, and therefore member checking involvement will be further elaborated in Section 5.3.

These English transcripts were then imported into NVivo. NVivo was utilised to systematically code the textual data and refine the category system. Based on systematic grounded theory, three coding stages were involved in this, open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The first step was open coding, which was utilised to identify substantive open codes. In open coding, I scanned through the transcript in “line-by-line analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 119) to generate common categories relating to factors that influence Chinese international students to study overseas, according to their properties and dimensions. This was done in an open way, without attempting to force the categories towards the six choices of the literature-derived framework. Notes from my journal further supplemented the triangulation of identified categories. The constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was also adopted to develop initial codes in the opening coding step. In doing constant comparisons, data of each interview was divided into manageable pieces, with each piece constantly compared for similarities and differences in respect to the whole (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This is in order to ensure consistency in the properties and dimensions of the factor

categories and the whole sense of the interview. Although all 10 interview transcripts had been broadly brushed in the line-by-line analysis and the constant comparisons, in order to exhaustively code all raw data, the techniques of auto-coding and coding stripes in NVivo were combined together to further analyse the raw data. At the end of the first-round of open coding, there was a suspicion that not all factors affecting student decisions were presented in the coding. Thus, open sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) immediately started. This was in order to gather more interview data. Repeatedly, data collecting from open sampling went through the procedures of transcribing, translating and open coding. Then I continued to sample until all categories of factors influencing Chinese international student decision making were saturated (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These factor categories from open coding were the foundation and beginning structure of theory building in this research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The second level of analysis, axial coding, commenced immediately after the saturation of factor categories, through the process of open coding. In order to form more precise and complete interpretations about the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), axial coding was to code around “axes” of factor categories by connecting these categories to themes and fragmenting them into sub-categories (Dey, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A feature of this step was to reexamine these categories from open coding in order to uncover interrelationships among categories. Questions were asked about contexts, conditions, causes, consequences, and other forms of connections and relationships between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The constant comparisons of data were also employed in this step of qualitative data analysis. This phase involved inductively emerging a paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which systematically organised themes that were choices within the decision making of the students, as well as categories which were factors influencing each choice and sub-categories that were sub-factors categorised under factors. Coding stability was checked through these transcripts by comparing my coding in NVivo over time. In an effort to pursue an exhaustive generation of these relationships among themes, categories and subcategories, a process of relational and variational sampling followed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After that, the newly gathered interview data were processed through transcribing, translating, and open coding to axial coding. Relational and variational sampling stopped when the interrelationships among the data were well established and validated (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At the end of axial coding, this data analysis step systematically produced choice themes, factor categories and factor sub-categories in a hierarchical coding structure in NVivo.

The last step of the coding process was selective coding to integrate and refine theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To be specific, choices and factors in Chinese international student decision making had been identified by open and axial coding, and therefore selective coding was used to generate the decision-making processes and assemble choices, factors and processes into the student decision-making models. As mentioned, this research employed a mixed methods approach, so the selective coding step in the qualitative data analysis in phase one just refined the preliminary theories. The following steps in data analysis further refined and eventually established the theories of this research, through consolidation of the results from both data

analyses in phase one and data analysis in phase two, and the integration of the results from these two phases.

Selective coding not only integrated codes and the relationships of these codes, but also evolved the thinking that occurred over time through immersion in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Themes, categories and sub-categories from the axial coding were constantly compared to form a higher level of abstraction in the data analysis. At the same time, the qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire section were integrated so as to enrich the understanding of the student decision making. With the combination of the qualitative survey data, the storyline of the potential theories was not very clear. Therefore, discriminate sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was engaged in. After gathering more interview data, the entire data analysis process was repeated. The end of this process depended on the theories becoming saturated in my sense (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Eventually, 23 interviews were conducted. The hierarchical coding structure in NVivo visually represented the storyline of the emerging theories.

Following several rounds of coding and the triangulation with artifacts, the six choices, 54 factors, 34 sub-factors, five decision-making processes, and four decision-making models of the Chinese international students in the case study emerged as preliminary results. It is worth mentioning that these six emerging themes from coding did fit comfortably into the pre-determined choice categories in the literature-derived framework of this research. Factors, sub-factors, processes and models were new derivations from the qualitative data analysis. Typical quotations would be checked at the end of the entire process of the data analysis. If these quotations were valid and trustworthy, they will be given in Chapters 6–11 to interpret the factors or sub-factors. The abbreviation in brackets at the end of each quotation in these chapters will indicate the interviewee source of the quotations. For example, IV9 means the quotation was from the ninth interviewee.

5.2.3 The Integration of Preliminary Results From Both Data Analyses in Phase One

After analysing the quantitative and qualitative data independently in phase one, the last step was to converge the preliminary results from both data analyses. A further refinement of the theories for this research was the aim of this results integration step.

This research chiefly adopted a “side-by-side analysis” (Creswell, 2012, p. 550) about how the results from the qualitative data analysis supported or refuted the quantitative data analysis, which is the most popular and standard approach to integrate quantitative data and qualitative data in convergent mixed methods design (Creswell, 2012; Tashakkori, Brown, & Borghese, 2010). The preliminary results from the quantitative data analysis and the qualitative data analysis of this research were directly compared. Factors influencing Chinese international student decision making that emerged from both data analyses were put together to compare with each other, and then identify whether factors from both sources were convergent or divergent, and what factors showed up in only one source. This led to a re-categorising of

factors and sub-factors. As a result, 46 factors and 47 sub-factors were confirmed. After member checking at the end of the data analysis, these will be presented in the results and discussion chapters, Chapters 6–11. This process also reaffirmed that the six choices that occur in the decision making of international students were consistent with those illustrated in the literature-derived framework for making choices of this research project. The interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative preliminary results about factors for each choice within the student decision making can be found in Chapters 6–11. In each of these chapters, the quantitative statistical results were presented, and then the qualitative quotes were provided to either confirm or disconfirm the quantitative results in order to generate the findings of this research; while some findings in these chapters were only interpreted by one type of data.

The importance of factors was identified from their results in the convergence of data. The decision-making processes of Chinese international students around receiving higher education in a regional Australian university emerged when these were combined with the preliminary results from the qualitative data analysis. To integrate the choices, factors and decision-making processes which were further developed in the data analysis integration, the theories about Chinese international student decision-making models was further refined. Taking into consideration the generalisability of the decision-making models from the case study in this step of the data analysis, general overseas higher education decision-making models of international students were derived.

Triangulation utilised in this research allowed me to consider the situation from various viewpoints, especially through the multiple types of data. This helped enhance the validity of the research instruments. The core of the measurement validity also refers to “how well the conceptual and operational definitions mesh with each other” (Neuman, 2006, p. 192). The results of this data analysis stage in this research revealed that the reasonable consistency between quantitative data and qualitative data, which both aligned with categories derived from the reviewed literature, further confirmed the high validity of the questionnaire and the interview schedules used in this research. In other words, both instruments actually measured what was intended to be measured in this research.

At the end of this data analysis stage, six choices, 46 factors, 47 sub-factors, five decision-making processes, four decision-making models from the case study, and four general decision-making models were found.

5.3 Data Analysis in Phase Two and the Convergence of the Results From the Two Phases of Data Analysis

Phase-two data analysis was to analyse the data gathered from the follow-up interviews. This was influenced by the rationale of systematic grounded theory, and was to help me interpret what the interview data were telling me, as well as confirm the development of the theories formulated from the first round of analysis. Unlike the qualitative data analysis in phase one however, this analysis employed simple rather than comprehensive techniques, and procedures

of grounded theory due to the distinct roles of the two phases in the process of building the theories. Phase-one data analysis established the theories grounded in the data of the decision-making models. Phase-two assessed the students' pre-departure decisions and all the relevant factors about UTAS study in order to confirm the theories that had been constructed in phase-one, instead of to further develop it. If the majority of interviewees were happy with the outcomes of their UTAS education, this would reinforce the decision-making results revealed by the first phase of analysis.

21 first-phase interviewees participated in the individual interviews in phase two. Each interview was conducted in Mandarin and lasted 20-30 minutes. Transcripts in Chinese were produced for all of the interviews. Then they were translated into English. Same as the qualitative data analysis in phase one, the interviews were carefully transcribed and translated by me in order to ensure the validity of transcription and to achieve equivalence of meanings between Chinese and English. I then provided each transcript and translation in phase two to its interviewee for member checking. All interviewees replied but no one raised any issue. It confirmed that all transcripts and translations were trustworthy records of the data collected in the second phase. Subsequently, all English transcripts were imported into NVivo. Compared to coding the qualitative data in the first-phase data analysis, the coding process in this phase was much simpler. Seven interview questions proposed in the schedule were the themes in the data analysis. Under each theme, the aspects of the best reflection of the interviewee perceptions or the most appropriate to address the questions were identified as core categories. Also, the occurrences of each core category were quantified to reflect their frequency. Chapter 12 will present the details of the results of the phase-two data analysis.

The results of phase-two data analysis revealed that the students believed that they had made a sensible decision in pursuing higher education at UTAS, and that they had taken the right factors into account when making that decision.

To integrate the results from both phases of data analysis, it was discovered that the results of phase two served to reinforce what had been identified in phase one. These two phases also triangulated convergence and correspondence of the research findings so that the validity of the research was even further enhanced. That is, this research found that the six choices, 46 factors, 47 sub-factors, five decision-making processes, four decision-making models of Chinese international students from the case study, and the four general decision-making models of international students were true.

In the end, the interview quotations from phase one which possibly as major supporting evidence of the research findings were sent to all interviewees to verify the quality and the accuracy. However, only three interviewees replied. They reflected they were satisfied with what had been presented in their quotations and required no changes. In order to make sure that all quotations meet the sense of the interviews, one of my colleagues who had competence in Chinese and English helped me check quotations from other 20 interviews. It confirmed that these quotations were accurate and they were clear evidence for this thesis. Besides that, I got verification of the trustworthiness of my findings by discussing with some interviewees when

writing up this thesis.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the macro-level analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data in both phases of research. Data analysis did not end there however. The final level of data analysis would occur during the writing process. That is, the micro-level analysis of both sets of data will be elaborated on in the rest of Part B, as well as Part C, along with the provision of representations of the results and discussion of this research. Chapters 6–11 will provide a comparative examination of the integration of both data analysis results from phase one relating to factors that impacted on Chinese international student intentions to study at UTAS. The interpretation and the results of phase-two data analysis will be presented in Chapter 12. Chapters 13 and 14 will then interpret the research findings which came from the convergence of both phases of data analysis, encompassing the decision-making processes, the Chinese international student decision-making models as well as generalised international student decision-making models. Implications for policy, practice and future research will be put forward in Chapter 15.

Chapter 6 Results and Discussion for Theme–Higher Education

6.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to examine the motivations for Chinese international students to undertake higher education, which is a choice in the broadest facet by the logic of the literature-derived framework for making choices (see Figure 6.1). It is notable that the choice of “higher education” made by Chinese international students in this study is not limited to bachelor level studies, but it also encompasses the determination to enrol for higher degrees, including in master’s and doctoral degrees. Note that bachelor’s degrees with honours are classified as a bachelor’s degree, and a master’s degree incorporates a master’s degree with honours here.

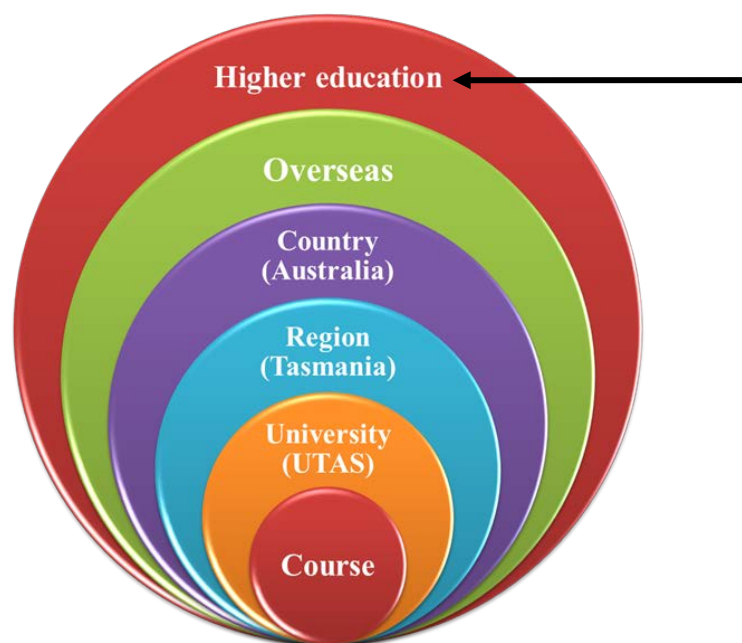


Figure 6.1. The choice of higher education within the literature-derived framework for making choices.

The motivations for Chinese international students to pursue higher education were investigated in both the survey and the interview in this research. In the questionnaire, one question concerned “the factors why you chose to progress to higher education” with seven reasons and an open-ended section, and was utilised to collect answers for this theme from survey respondents. For those seven reasons, five-point Likert scales were used, ranging from “very important”, to “very unimportant”, to “never considered”. The final number of responses to this question in survey was 459.

Table 6.1 provides a descriptive statistics summary of the survey data for this choice of higher education. The reasons are listed based on their sequence from the smallest mean value to the

largest. The smaller mean value of a reason stands for the greater importance of this reason, while a reason with a bigger mean is less important. Also, in order to present the spread of responses, standard deviation for each factor, and the distribution of the five-point Likert scales in each factor are shown in this table.

Table 6.1

Descriptive Statistics Summary of the Survey Data for the Choice–Higher Education¹

Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
Future employment prospects	4.34	0.831	48.8%	41.6%	6.3%	0.9%	2.4%
Gaining knowledge	4.32	0.76	44.0%	48.8%	4.8%	0.4%	2.0%
Broadening horizons	4.18	0.885	39.9%	46%	9.4%	2.2%	2.6%
Improving the quality of life	4.14	0.951	40.1%	43.6%	10.9%	1.5%	3.9%
Self-actualisation	4.03	0.992	33.8%	47.5%	12.2%	1.3%	5.2%
Chinese tradition	2.99	1.271	12.4%	23.3%	34.9%	9.8%	19.6%
Pressure from parents/teachers/friends	2.92	1.3	11.1%	25.3%	29.4%	12.4%	21.8%

Apart from the survey, the reasons for Chinese international students to choose to enrol in a degree were explored in face-to-face individual interviews. Based on the interview schedule, the question “why would you intend to go on to higher education instead of working?” was asked in the interviews. A totally of 23 interviewees provided answers to this question.

The reasons in Table 6.1 will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter, with evidence and additional key factors collected from all 23 interviews as well as from the open-ended questionnaire section. Follow up discussion factors from the questionnaire, vital additional motivations highlighted by interviewees, and respondents in the open-ended questionnaire section were supplemented for discussion in this chapter.

6.2 Future Employment Prospects

It is worth mentioning that future employment prospects are of the most significance amongst all of the motivators that Chinese international students expressed for choosing to go to university. Specifically, an inspection of mean ranked of all seven factors for the choice for higher education indicated that future employment prospects was awarded the highest score (mean score = 4.34), which means that this was the most important influencing factor. Not only in this choice of higher education, but also among all of the six choices (higher education, overseas, Australia, Tasmania, UTAS, course), future employment prospects had the highest

¹ SD = Standard Deviation; VI = Very Important; I = Important; UI = Unimportant; VUI = Very Unimportant; NC = Never Considered.

mean value among all of the reasons in the whole questionnaire. Not unexpectedly, and consistent with the survey results, the importance of this factor was also shown in the individual interviews where all of the 23 interviewees elaborated on future employment prospects as a key factor for seeking higher education. That can also be primarily divided in two subgroups, immediate career goals and an adaptation to the status quo of Chinese society.

6.2.1 Immediate Career Goals

Intrinsically, immediate career goals surfaced widely as a factor across the interviewee cohort no matter whether they had been employed before they commenced their current higher education.

For some students who were/are employees, and who intended to stay in the same career field, qualifications or degree-related certificates from university usually were the pre-requisite for job promotion. Attending university would facilitate this for them ahead of their colleagues. There were three Chinese interviewees who respectively worked in mainland China, Hong Kong, or Singapore, who all noted this factor. One of them illustrated it like this:

Employers in Asian countries highly value qualifications. In my company, employees who have a bachelor's degree or a diploma are treated differently in job promotion or wage increase. Studying this bachelor's program is for my future (promotion). A bachelor's degree is one of the requirements for a manager position. My promotion will be restricted if I only have a diploma. (IV11)

For other interviewees who had work experience but aimed to change to a new field in the future, receiving higher education was a wise approach for helping them realise this transition. Interviewees pointed out that after they worked in a field for a while, the job failed to keep them interested, because they realised that the ceiling in that job blocked breakthrough, or the process of doing the work was not actually pleasurable. Alternatively, it could be that the job was actually far from what they expected, and therefore they attempted to change to another job with fresh surroundings. More importantly, their ideal jobs were in different career fields. Thus, it was an appropriate time for them to come back to university for the sake of recharging, as well as to gain a higher level qualification and prepare them for their newly chosen future career.

Apart from those who already had work experience, there were some diploma or degree holders who had never had a formal job before receiving higher education at UTAS. These interviewees were then driven by their immediate career goals to progress onto even further higher education. In most of these cases, they had tried to hunt for a major-related job when they had just gained their previous qualification in China, but it had turned out to be quite arduous for them. Several reasons were cited: (a) a lack of work experience to meet the job requirements, especially for people who graduated from a professional course, like Accounting; (b) discontentment with a low salary, or a heavy work load; (c) a scarcity of major-related work in the job market. On the positive side however, higher degree requirements of their desired career motivated most of

them to go on to higher education.

6.2.2 An Adaptation to the Status Quo of Chinese Society

Engaging in higher education by Chinese students is to certain degree a true reflection upon their adaptation to the status quo of modern Chinese society. Chinese people believe a good education will guarantee them a better future (Jiang & Ashley, 2000), specifically, a decent job. This intensely passionate belief in higher education undoubtedly originates from the ongoing influence of the ancient civil service examinations of Imperial China, which were the only official approach to select candidates for the state bureaucracy at that time, and which has a history of more than 1,500 years. In contemporary China, with even more fierce competition occurring now, it is still widely accepted that a bachelor's degree is the minimum qualification for a good occupation. This was proved by 13 of the interviewees who were doing bachelor's programs or higher degree courses, and who all indicated that gaining a university qualification was to enhance their employment competitiveness. Without a bachelor's degree, the essential element, it would be very difficult to access a good job in China. High school qualifications alone would only lead to low level jobs.

In Chinese society, people generally refuse to go for a job right after high school instead of attending university. People need at least a bachelor's degree to access jobs.... Considering the fierce employment competition, university qualifications are a “threshold” (门槛, mén kǎn) which stops some people, who cannot meet the requirement, from getting a decent job. (IV19)

Throughout the relevant literature, only a small proportion (e.g. Kember, 2016) focuses on Asian students' motivations for receiving higher education. The world's largest survey of prospective international students (43,919 prospective international students from 176 countries, the majority of which were from Asia), the International Student Survey (ISS) (Hobsons Solutions, 2016), indicated that enhancing employability was the principal and always the main reason for international students to go to university. This was the result of surveys over a number of years. In the latest literature, Kember (2016) explored why Hong Kong students were motivated to enrol in higher education. One of his findings was the role of career, in his self-created motivational orientation framework. The findings in my research also align with the results from those two research projects. However, my research here narrows the target group into one nationality, Chinese, and takes Kember's finding one step further. In other words, it generalises his findings from Hong Kong students to the broader target group, including students from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau.

6.3 Gaining Knowledge and Skills

As a representatively academic factor, gaining knowledge and skills are one of the primary motivations pushing Chinese international students to progress onto higher education. This item was the second most significant factor for respondents, since it had the second highest

mean score (mean of 4.32) among all of the seven reasons for receiving higher education as well as amongst all of the factors of the entire survey. It was also in alignment with survey respondents, where knowledge and skill acquisition were a theme in the interviews, highlighted by roughly half of the interviewees. According to interviews, this factor could be divided into two sub-themes based on distinct knowledge types: acquiring professional knowledge and skills, and extending general knowledge and skills.

Chinese international students have strongly felt need to gain professional knowledge and skills as part of their higher education experience. Interviewees who were high school graduates or degree graduates expressed a strong desire to enhance their capabilities in order to develop competence for future occupations. This was due to what they felt was impractical knowledge that they had obtained during previous study.

There is a large gap between knowledge and skills gained from high school and those required in working. From primary school to secondary school in China, education is oriented to examinations rather than to learning practical skills and knowledge which could be applied in graduate jobs. Thus, knowledge from high school is insufficient (for working) so I need to be equipped with a great deal of knowledge and skills after high school to become competent at work. (IV12)

Unlike new graduates, experienced employees who were interviewed were very aware of what sorts of professional knowledge is offered by their current program at university, the kind that will potentially benefit their career development. Some who had already encountered issues in their occupations realised the need to extend their professional knowledge, as a lack of professional knowledge may cause a career bottleneck in the future. In the same way, the other interviewees attempted to bridge that issue in advance before they had graduated.

Many also believed that higher education would extend their general knowledge and skills. Abundant existing literature (e.g. Ho, 1986; Matsui, 1995) has discovered that Asian students from a “Confucian heritage culture” (CHC), that is, mainly students from China have high motivation to further their education, and they treat study very seriously. In this way in this study, participants expressed expectations and aspirations for an improvement in their general knowledge as a desirable outcome.

University is thus a platform to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge systematically and comprehensively for some Chinese students. One interviewee noted: “It would be quite difficult to learn knowledge systematically merely by myself. I feel university can help me resolve this problem” (IV16). On the other hand, those participants in interviews who had particularly been underachievers previously, were filled with deep longing to now acquire the knowledge and skills desired by them, and they expected that engaging in higher education would be a major contributor towards this.

People usually have expectations for the level and the amount of knowledge they should master. The knowledge I had was far away from that which I had hoped

to master. There was still a long way to go. Hence, I decided to receive higher education to fill the gap. (IV13)

Very limited studies (e.g. Bamber, 2014; Kember, 2016) have also discovered that the acquisition of knowledge and skills is a major motivator for Chinese students seeking education. This study is in line with the findings in Kember's work (2016) concerning this issue. Kember's finding was in relation to Postgraduate Taught (PGT) in Hong Kong. The findings here however encompass not only PGT, but also undergraduates and Postgraduate Research (PGR), and again, the target group here was extended from Hong Kong to Greater China.

When it comes to extending general knowledge and skills, in contrast to Bamber (2014), where it was identified as a secondary factor only for Chinese female postgraduates, this research found that it is a primary motivation for many Chinese international students to enrol in a range of courses. In addition, the ISS (Hobsons Solutions, 2016) showed that gaining knowledge was the top priority in the list of factors for international students, especially Asian international students, which is in line with the findings here that gaining knowledge and skills is one of the very top few reasons for Chinese international students to engage in higher education.

6.4 Broadening Horizons

Chinese people's passion for higher education as a means to improve their social standing is closely associated with a desire to broaden their horizons. The mean result for this factor was 4.18, and so it was for the third significant place amongst all factors. Broadening horizons was not only of considerable importance in the survey, but also drawing participants' attention in interviews.

In total, five interviewees made this point through the phrase, "experiencing university life". All of them were full of passion and expectations towards university life. It was a driving force underpinning their excitement and aspirations, and was primarily centred on three areas. First of all, they imagined and expected university life to be extremely fun, as a large number of enjoyable extra-curricular activities would be available for them which were not previously available at school or in workplace. Second, they deemed university to be necessary and important as an experience within their whole life, and that this experience was to be highly valued. One interviewee expressed it like this: "This university experience is more important than the wealth you will have in the future" (IV 8). Third, it was believed that experiencing university life would contribute to them being able to adapt to real society faster and more smoothly after graduation, which was expressed in the following way by one participant, "Chinese generally believe that university is a small society, called a 'mock society', because university was less complex than real society but richer than school. It is better to experience this small society before stepping into the big society" (IV15).

While there is little discussion in the literature about the desire to broaden horizons as a factor for international students' choice to pursue higher education, Kember's research (2016) has

identified university lifestyle as a motivator for Hong Kong students further education. In addition, the annual ISS in 2016, found that students from Asia ranked the experiencing of “university life” as the most important factor amongst all six factors for their decisions to go to university (Hobsons EMEA, 2016). This study agrees with those findings, but observes two other points that enrich the understanding of this factor, that is, that Chinese students can view the university experience as a significant part of a completed life, and that they see that experiencing that will help them adapt to “real” society further in the future.

6.5 Improving the Quality of Life

Improving quality of life has also inspired numbers of Chinese international students to pursue a higher education. A considerable number of questionnaire respondents expressed that this was an important factor for them, and the mean score for this factor was accordingly rather high (mean score = 4.14). That is, it ranked as the fourth important motivational factor among the seven reasons given for choosing higher education. It may have been predicted that improving quality of life would have had a greater impact on the choice of receiving higher education, but it had less significance than other issues such as future employment prospects, and gaining knowledge and skills. This might be because professions and knowledge can be obtained in the process of receiving higher education and directly after graduation, while the improvement of quality of life was a long-term benefit. This reflects the fact that Chinese people tend to have very high expectations towards higher education.

In interviews however, only one participant reported that higher education would facilitate a raising of his social status, which is another way to express improving quality of life. He remarked: “In China, I am in this social class. Higher education would make me become a person in the upper social class.” (IV12). The significance of this factor is also identified in literature (Bai, 2006; Li & Bray, 2007). Bai (2006), as well as Li and Bray (2007) addressed this phenomenon of higher education being treated in China as a ladder to maintain upper-middle class, or as a way to raise social status. They also investigated how it could be a means of obtaining wealth and power. This seems to originate from the Chinese feudal era, when the only channel for upward social mobility was the civil service examination system.

6.6 Self-Actualisation

Another crucial motivation for Chinese students’ pursuit of higher education is self-actualisation. This motivator was rated at a mean of 4.03 in questionnaire responses, which was relatively high. The importance of self-actualisation was not only shown in this survey but was also reflected in a significant number of interview responses.

Self-actualisation chiefly emerged as a type of intrinsic motivation for Chinese students, but it was triggered by an extrinsic factor, Chinese culture, which became evident in some of the interviews. On the basis of different views of Chinese participants expressed in the interviews, self-actualisation could be categorised into two types: fulfilling the university dream, and

realising individual goals.

6.6.1 Fulfilling the University Dream

The first type of self-actualisation is the fulfilling of the university dream. This motivation has a historic root. The majority of participants in this research were born in the 1980s and 1990s (see section 5.2.1.1). They grew up under the transition from elite to mass higher education in China, and thus they are a generation who is still strongly influenced by the belief that people with university qualification are elites. Attending university for them is a common dream. Approximately one third of interviewees stated that attending university to get a bachelor's degree had been a dream since childhood, and that this had driven them to study hard from day to day. At the same time, this goal has become for them a compulsory task to achieve.

My goal since childhood was to study in a university after high school instead of working directly. In addition, I had studied hard for a long time, so it was better to receive higher education rather than work.... I did not hesitate about whether to receive higher education or not, but I was only worried about what kind of university I could attend. (IV18)

6.6.2 Realising Individual Goals

The other type is to realise individual goals. A misconstrual of the traditional Western view towards Confucian educational values is that only collectivism heavily influences the learning behaviour of Chinese students. However, in Western academia more recently there has been a debate on "Confucian" academic values around prevailing "deficit" and fresh "surplus" views of Chinese learners (Ryan, 2010). Surplus theories of Chinese "culture of learning" attempts to identify more positive spheres CHC learners so that counters deficit theories, such as Chinese learners always being rote learners (Ryan & Louie, 2005; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Individualism has grown in importance in the Neo-Confucian tradition. In fact, the Neo-Confucian tradition has elaborated on individualism to mean liberalism, that is, "learning for the sake of the self" (Tu, 1985, p. 55) or a further interpretation of self-cultivation (Lee, 1996). This study also proves that this kind of self-realisation found in Neo-Confucian thought has also occurred among the new generation of Chinese students. Some interviewees had clear individual goals which they desired to achieve through attending university.

I graduated from an ordinary university with an average academic record in an ordinary major, but I do not want to just be an ordinary person, and that is not something that I want. I want to be an intellectual. But now I think only people who have a doctoral degree could be called an intellectual, so I sought a higher degree course.... I want to do a job which is for intellectuals. (IV13)

Others also stated how attending university would boost the realisation of their goals.

For a few people, maybe they have the potential to involve themselves in society after graduating from high school, while for the majority, it is pretty difficult to realise your dreams after graduating from high school. University is a place to inspire people's potential. (IV16)

Part of the above findings echo Kember's (2016) observation that individual goal setting was an initial motivation for Hong Kong students to enrol in a degree. The only difference between this research and Kember's is that this one elaborates on self-actualisation as a motivator within the context of Confucian culture.

6.7 Chinese Tradition

Chinese students are also largely driven by sociocultural factors, that is, Chinese tradition in their desire to pursue higher education. The mean for this reason of 2.99, stood for unimportance. Also, the ranking of its mean value amongst all seven factors for choosing to progress to higher education was quite low. Notwithstanding, this low rank might be slightly misleading, since the answers of most interviewees clearly hinted towards Chinese tradition as a big influence on their decision to further their education. To some extent, the impact of Chinese tradition, such as Confucianism, for Chinese students was so strong that they might not actually be fully aware of its influence. This could explain why it was a significant factor, but also why it was rated at a low mean value.

Interview participants further revealed that compliance and conformity were two primary elements rooted in Chinese tradition which had pushed them to engage in higher education.

6.7.1 Compliance

Chinese people tightly cling to their long history and are still deeply influenced by Chinese tradition. Chinese tradition has placed a high value on education, particularly in CHC. "To be a scholar is to be at the top of society (万般皆下品，惟有读书高, wàn bān jiē xià pǐn, wéi yǒu dú shū gāo)" from a Confucian in the Song dynasty, and this is still a common motto for the majority of Chinese. For this reason, proceeding onto higher education is an accepted attitude, a recognised norm, and one popularised in China these days. In this way compliance as a component of Chinese tradition still prevails today.

Influenced by these two elements in Chinese tradition, Chinese students take for granted the need to pursue higher education. In interviews, some participants even felt quite surprised about why they were even being asked their reasons for pursuing higher education, and the question seemed to have no answer, or in fact, need no reason. They believed that every Chinese knows the reason behind the choice to gain a higher education. Some interviewees stated that receiving a higher education is an integral part of Chinese traditional thinking, and illustrated this point by saying things like this: "In Chinese traditional thought, we at least need to get a bachelor's degree" (IV12).

Besides thinking that it is a natural step to attend university, interviewees never questioned the fact that studying at one level is always preparation for the next level right up until university, since the majority of Chinese young people follow the prescribed sequence in a step-by-step fashion.

I think everyone would make the same decision (to receive higher education). Enrolling at a good primary school is to have access to enrolling at a good junior school. Enrolling at a good junior school is to get an offer from a good senior school. The purpose of enrolling at a good senior school is to offer yourself more opportunities to enrol at a good university. The final goal is to go to university. (IV19)

6.7.2 Conformity

Conformity is the other aspect in Chinese tradition linked to seeking a higher education which was mentioned by interviewees. Traditionally, conformity is viewed as being similar to collectivism, but as a negative construct focused on a desire to “fit in”. When interviewees were asked what negative reasons led them into seeking a higher education if any, some mentioned conformity. More particularly, receiving higher education was a behaviour for them to conform to within China.

The public believes that students should receive higher education. Receiving higher education is the trend to follow. If you do not attend university, but only hold qualifications from a vocational secondary education or vocational tertiary education, you cannot be counted as an outstanding person. You are not a good student in their mind. You are a loser. Those pushed me to seek higher education since I need to be recognised by the public. People need “face” (面子, miàn zi). (IV12)

Not just from people who chose to go to university for bachelor’s degrees, conformity was also an identified factor for higher degree seekers as well. For some, conformity dominated their choice towards postgraduate education. It was the comparatively easier decision for them to swim with the tide and get a higher degree, when they were finding it difficult to decide what to do after their bachelor’s degree.

The point discovered in this research was that compliance with Chinese tradition is also a factor that influencing Chinese students to choose higher education. This ties in with Kember’s observations (2016) that it is one of the issues initially motivating Hong Kong students to go to university. However, conformity as identified in this study is a factor that pushes some Chinese people to pursue higher education, and this has been scarcely touched on in the existing research literature.

6.8 The Influence of Family or Peers

Family and peers also play a vital role in motivating Chinese students to progress onto higher education. Self-actualisation originates within individualism, but influence from family and peers develops from a place with greater emphasis on group orientation and collectivism. This reveals that Chinese students' choice to seek higher education is not just a simplistic and one-sided decision, but it strikes a balance through consideration of a wide range of factors and influences.

This factor of pressure from parents, teachers, or friends yielded then a surprising mean value of 2.92, which was less significant than the other six factors. It stands for unimportance. But 65% of interviewees highlighted that this was an important influencing factor that directly influenced their choice for education.

This inconsistency between survey responses and interviews probably was due to a few reasons. First, very few interviewees considered this factor negatively, so “influence” instead of “pressure” was the term used by them in their conversations in the interviews. Accordingly, the wording, pressure in the questionnaire item might have been inappropriate. Second, family, parents, friends, and peers were mentioned in interviews but not teachers. Survey respondents may not have rated this factor as important, since if teachers did not have an influence of their choice of higher education, they may have discounted the whole item. Third, this factor could be seen by survey respondents as important, but not a dominant one.

From the interview results, family and peers were the chief referents that motivated Chinese students to progress onto higher education. This influence from family and peers has a deep root in core values of Chinese culture.

6.8.1 The Influence of Family

The influence of family, especially parents, is a strong factor at play behind the students' choice of higher education. Chinese people attach great importance to education, particularly higher education, which has been discussed in the previous reasons in this chapter. It is worth noting that 97.9% of survey respondents, and all interviewees in this research were born after the year of 1979, when mainland China's family planning policy was introduced. Unlike previous generations, as the only child in the family, this generation of Chinese students received undivided attention, and heightened financial as well as emotional support from their parents and the whole larger family; therefore, they usually have been called “little emperors” or “little empresses” in their family (Chung, Holdsworth, Li, & Fam, 2009). At the same time, their family has had high expectation on them. Families wanted their child to become “a winner” rather than to lose right at the starting line, so receiving higher education is considered a necessary goal for them. Interviewees noted that their parents and even grandparents expected them to gain at least a bachelor's degree. Attending university had also become their parents' will and dream. This put great pressure on them. Some interviewees pointed out that receiving

higher education was actually the decision of their parents who are the authorities in their family so they negatively agreed with their parents, while others tended to treat seeking higher education positively since they deemed their parents' decision about attending university was good for them.

There were two kinds of response in the interviews concerning this, with people from distinct family backgrounds elaborating on their family influences towards their choice of higher education. The first type was interviewees whose families had a good educational background and who did not want to fall behind the family standard. This type of interviewee mostly indicated that their family members, such as their parents and/or relatives who had university qualifications, were quite successful in their careers and their life. Consequently, those interviewees felt very proud of their families. Also, their family expected them to follow the same path and pursue a higher level of education. This is a part of the group-oriented mindset valued by Confucian values.

Before I attended the National College Entrance Examination¹ (高考, gāo kǎo) in China, my grandfather from my dad's side told me that brothers of my great-grandfather in my family had received higher education in Japan, and since that generation in my family, most of my family members have had university qualifications. If I could not receive higher education, I would not be a member of this family. This is not pressure from my family, because I also think I need to improve my academic history. (IV13)

The other kind of interviewees were from "grassroots" families and aimed to be the first-in-their-family students at university, so that they could win honour for their family or parents. This is quite unlike the phenomenon in Western countries; where it seems to be less likely that children from families without a university education history go onto receive a higher education. China, with its Confucian heritage expects people to upgrade their education levels, generation by generation (Kember, 2016).

What is more, receiving higher education was also their parents' dream. This dream however had not been able to be realised under the era of the elite higher education in China, and therefore, they are now trying their best to make the most out of this opportunity for their parents. These students felt that gaining a university qualification was an obligation for their family and themselves, which is primarily influenced by filial piety and collectivism, core values of Confucian culture.

The first reason for me to receive higher education was due to my mother. My mother was a smart person, but she only received primary school education.

¹ The National College Entrance Examination is an academic examination held annually in mainland China. It scores are prerequisites for mainland Chinese people for entrance into almost all higher education institutions at the undergraduate level in China.

Although she is a successful business woman, she suffered losses (吃亏, chī kuī) owing to a lack of education, but she did not want her son to suffer losses in the future. She said that no matter which level I wanted to reach in higher education, she would support me financially. (IV17)

6.8.2 The Influence of Peers

The choice to pursue higher education made can also be affected by their friends and peers. More specifically, some respondents expressed a strong desire to maintain a sense of belonging with peers, and most indicated that they had been highly influenced in their decisions by peers that they valued. That is, enrolment in university was a prerequisite to being fully included in their circle of friends. As one interviewee said, “lots of my previous university friends in China are studying in prestigious universities. I like comparing, so I feel it is necessary for me to progress to receive a master’s degree education” (IV20).

However, others showed more resilience to this particular kind of atmosphere. Although they admitted to experiencing peer pressure, they only followed proceeded into higher education because they realised that it had certain benefits for their future as well.

A few interviewees indicated that they did not experience any pressure, but they stated all the same that they took up a friend’s suggestions or followed other peers on the pathway to university. One interviewee indicated this factor 10 individual times with different wording each time, “I only knew my friends would come with me, so I do not care about other reasons.... If my friends would not come, I would not come” (IV1). That illustrated that peer influence provided this person with the most pertinent reason for his decision making, and it also directly guided him to engage with higher education.

A number of studies (e.g. Chung et al., 2009; Willis & Kennedy, 2004) have investigated how Chinese form expectations towards international higher education associated with particular reference groups, but there is a dearth of studies that focus on the actual motivations of Chinese students for enrolling at university. The only known study is that of Kember (2016), who identified three social influences for the motivation of Hong Kong students in choosing higher education. They were the three factors of family, student peers, and teachers. Compared to this research of Kember’s, teachers were not referenced in my study. Both Hong Kong and mainland China are in CHC, but without the implementation of the *One-Child Policy* in Hong Kong, family influence brought about different outcomes with mainland China.

6.9 Other Factors

Besides the above seven factors which derived from items in the survey and were also perceived by interviewees as being at play in their conscious decision making, there were other crucial reasons for continuing on to higher education which consistently arose in the interviews as well as in the open-ended questionnaire section. Although the survey did not encompass

those factors as a result of a lack of supporting literature, it cannot be neglected that these factors played important roles in driving Chinese to attend university since those factors were supported with the evidence of interviews and answers in the open-ended questionnaire section.

6.9.1 Qualifications

Academic ambition is also a motivation for pursuing tertiary education. That is, perhaps unsurprisingly, that gaining academic qualifications was reported to be a contributing motivator for choosing higher education. The significance attached to university qualifications was highlighted by most interviewees and by some of the respondents of the open-ended section of the survey. Their discussions primarily centred on three types of qualifications: general university qualifications, higher degrees, and degree-related professional certificates.

The intangible value of a university degree acted as a trigger for Chinese students in seeking out university qualifications. A considerable number of interviewees and survey respondents expressed that high aspirations behind pursuing their tertiary education. This group was made up of people enrolled in different levels of degree programs. Their aspirations were attributable to the belief that university qualifications are in themselves an honour. Under the influence of this belief, they were discontented with the qualifications that they held, and were motivated to seek out higher levels of education. School underachievers also had a strong ambition to improve their academic achievement by a university qualification, and to so prove that they are not failures in the area of study.

The motivation for master's degree holders to pursue doctoral degrees was also seen, and they deemed that as even more valuable than their master's. There were two master's degree holders amongst all three interviewees who were undertaking doctoral programs. One was in the field of natural science and the other was in the humanities. Both of them mentioned the main reason that they enrolled in a doctoral degree was that master's degrees strive for life in the crevice between bachelor's degrees and doctoral degrees. In other words, after gaining a master's degree, they found that it was not as practical as a bachelor's and not as academic as a doctoral degree. As a result, attaining a doctoral degree was the stated solution for them.

To obtain degree-related professional certificates is a significant driving force that pushed Chinese students to enrol in university, especially in Australia. Although only one interviewee and a few respondents for questionnaire open-ended section indicated this influencing factor, this reason was representative and typical. Additionally, this was a core issue in the conversation with that interviewee, and he spent a large amount of time elaborating on this factor. The outcomes of attending universities for some Chinese international students were not only to acquire a degree but also to receive a degree-related professional certificate. Those certificates would be helpful for holders to smoothly step into relevant industries and to get jobs in that field.

6.9.2 Confusion About the Future

Confusion about the future is a personal factor that contributed to Chinese graduates deciding to continue onto higher education. This was in fact mentioned by three interviewees and a few respondents to the questionnaire's open-ended section. The interviewees were holders of a diploma, a bachelor's degree and a master's degree respectively, but all of them mentioned that there had been a great deal of tension and confusion when they were about to complete their previous levels of higher education. They reported that influence from family or peers played a pivotal role for them in those moments. Further study was always suggested by family or peers as the solution to provide extra time for those "perpetual students" to consider or plan their future, on the grounds that seeking higher education seemed to be worthwhile and integral to their personal values.

When I was going to graduate from my bachelor's degree program, I felt high pressure, so I always called my mother, and cried since I did not know what I should do. At that time, I told my mother that I only knew about [the major], but I could not do things in other fields. I had lost confidence. But my mother encouraged me to enrol for a master's degree program in which maybe I could learn more. Further study would enrich myself so that I could be more confident. (IV2)

6.9.3 Availability of Full Scholarships

Availability of full scholarships is also a decisive economic factor that influenced the choices of Chinese doctoral degree seekers. This is attributable to the distinct features of doctor degrees. In the mind of Chinese students, undergraduate education is "compulsory" to receive, and therefore, scholarships do not play a role in influencing them to choose one. Scholarship availability could impact on the choice of whether they pursued a master's degree. However, master's degree tends to be increasingly popular among Chinese, so even without scholarships they can still be willing to progress on to achieving one.

In contrast to the sense that achieving an undergraduate or master's level of education is just compulsory, the choice to proceed to a doctoral level to a larger extent is linked to people's personal needs and opportunities. Two doctoral students both stated that the availability of a full scholarship was not an initial factor, but that it was a decisive factor in their choice to progress onto that program. There had been initial uncertainty as to whether they should study further or to hunt for a job. The full scholarship offers however drove them to make the final decision to enrol for a doctoral program. Without the scholarship, fees would have stopped them from pursuing a higher level of education. The availability of scholarships was also listed in the questionnaire open-ended section by a few survey respondents.

6.9.4 The Pleasure of Studying

Enjoying study is also reported as a motivation for some Chinese students to engage in higher

education, although it is not a deciding influencing factor. A few interviewees and respondents of the open-ended section chose this point in answer for why they received higher education instead of working. Some had been employed for a long period of time and deemed that leave from work would reward them for their long-term hard work, since studying for them was a kind of relaxation and rest. As one interviewee pointed out:

Once I stopped studying and started to work, I felt that studying at university is a pleasure, a happiness. Indeed, I enjoyed the comfortable feeling of being a student. Thus, I chose to resign and then come to attend a master's degree course at university. (IV3)

Consistent with this, another group of students did not have work experience, but chose to go on studying at university rather than look for a job, primarily because university is a “sanctuary” away from work, and they preferred student life. A few survey respondents filled in the open-ended section of the questionnaire with comments like “I do not want to work”. One interviewee remarked, “I prefer studying to working, because student life is very pure. I can make some good friends rather than compete with my colleagues” (IV21).

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive interpretation of results. It contains a discussion of the first facet in the literature-derived framework for making choices, the higher education choice of Chinese international students, by identifying underlying motivations from surveys and interviews. Chinese international students are motivated by 11 key factors, which are social, economic, academic, cultural, and personal, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic, when making their choice to receive higher education:

- Future employment prospects
 - Immediate career goals
 - An adaptation to the status quo of Chinese society
- Gaining knowledge and skills
- Broadening horizons
- Improving the quality of life
- Self-actualisation
 - Fulfilling the university dream
 - Realising individual goals
- Chinese tradition
 - Compliance
 - Conformity
- The Influence of family or peers
 - The influence of family
 - The influence of peers
- Qualifications

- Confusion about the future
- Availability of full scholarships
- The pleasure of studying

These 11 motivations are not mutually exclusive, instead, different Chinese international students enrolled at UTAS are motivated sometimes by one of them, or at times attracted simultaneously to a number of them.

This chapter has partly addressed the first research question (what are the factors influencing the choices of Chinese international students in their decision to enrol in a regional Australian university?) according to the primary objective of this research (to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university).

Chapter 7 Results and Discussion for Theme– Overseas

7.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, the question of why Chinese students choose to pursue higher education was addressed. This chapter will now explore the next logical choice that confronts Chinese students about their future, as seen in the literature-derived framework for making choices of this research (Figure 7.1), that is, why Chinese students choose to receive higher education abroad rather than in China.

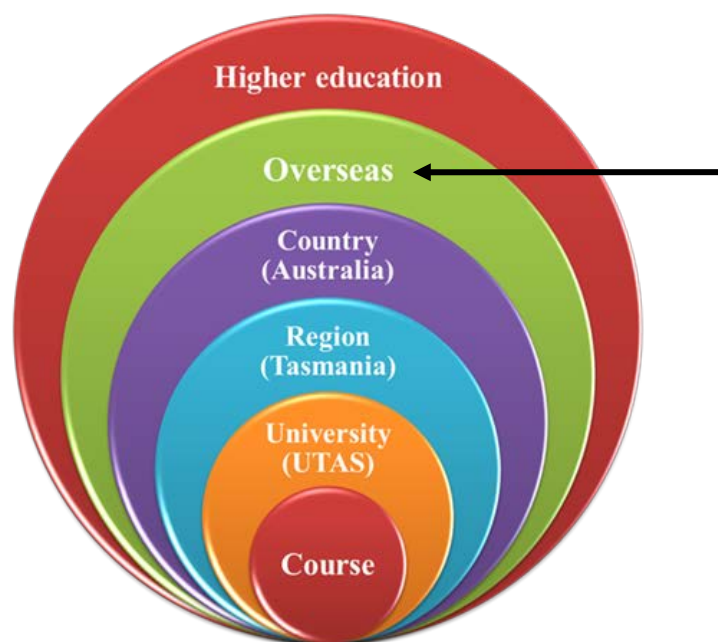


Figure 7.1. The choice to study overseas within the literature-derived framework for making choices.

It has been assumed that individual Chinese students have diverse motivations for pursuing higher education overseas, and so through both the survey and the interview this research has explored what these determinants are. In the survey, there was a question that asked students to respond to “the factors why you chose to study overseas” with eight reasons offered for their response, and an open-ended section was used to collect further written elaborations. Five-point Likert scales were adopted for the eight reasons. There were 459 people fully responding to this question in the questionnaire.

The descriptive statistics summary of the survey data for this choice of studying overseas is shown in Table 7.1. The order of reasons in the table is listed on the basis of the sequence of mean values. In addition, the table provides standard deviation for each factor, and the distribution of five-point Likert scales for each factor, presenting the spread of survey

responses.

Table 7.1

Descriptive Statistics Summary of the Survey Data for the Choice–Overseas¹

Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
Improving English	4.27	0.862	44.9%	43.6%	7.6%	1.3%	2.6%
Gaining international/intercultural experience	4.2	0.852	39.2%	48.4%	9.2%	0.2%	3.1%
Higher quality education compared with China	3.99	1.014	32.9%	45.3%	15.3%	0.9%	5.7%
Learning to be independent	3.61	1.241	25.3%	38.6%	20.0%	4.4%	11.8%
Raising status	3.41	1.124	14.2%	38.6%	32.2%	4.1%	10.9%
Seeking freedom	3.36	1.319	23.3%	26.1%	29.6%	5.4%	15.5%
Difficulty gaining entry into Chinese higher education	2.91	1.357	13.1%	23.5%	29.2%	9.4%	24.8%
Following the trend to study overseas	2.81	1.276	9.6%	21.1%	34.0%	11.5%	23.7%

Besides the survey, individual interviews also explored why Chinese students had chosen to study overseas. On the basis of the interview schedule, the question, “what reason/reasons stimulated you to seek to study abroad rather than in one of the higher education institutions in China?” was asked in the interviews. All 23 interviewees provided answers to the question.

The rest of this chapter addresses each of the reasons outlined in Table 7.1, with evidence and additional key factors collected from all 23 interviews, as well as from the open-ended questionnaire section. Finally, this chapter will also add vital additional reasons for study abroad that were highlighted by interviewees and respondents in the open-ended questionnaire section.

7.2 Improving English Language Ability

Improving their English language ability is a dominant factor taken into consideration by Chinese international students when deciding to study abroad. Survey respondents scored this factor with the highest mean score (mean= 4.27) amongst all of the reasons listed in the questionnaire for the choice of choosing to study overseas. In other words, this was the

¹SD = Standard Deviation; VI = Very Important; I = Important; UI = Unimportant; VUI = Very Unimportant; NC = Never Considered.

fundamental reason for survey respondents to pursue overseas higher education. It implies that Chinese students who seek overseas higher education tend to choose English-speaking countries, and that this may well be the default option for them. It also reveals the high value that Chinese international students attach to English language learning.

It is clear from these survey results that this is the most important issue when choosing overseas study, since a high proportion of interviewees selected it (approximately one quarter). The following comment from one interviewee is representative, “at that time, I believed this would be an opportunity for me to improve my English, because English was my worst subject. I knew that my English was poor, so I needed to improve it” (IV12).

In addition, some interview participants indicated that improving their English was the main reason they headed overseas, because mastering English is so closely associated with acquiring employability skills.

My ideal job in the future is to do research. My reason to go abroad for study was that English is the first international academic language in the world. I felt that if I study abroad, I should be able to develop my English language more, (which would be beneficial for my future career), so I had to select an English-speaking country. (IV23)

This “English language” motivator has been identified in a substantial body of existing literature as one of the main attracting factors for international students in making their decision to study overseas, but only a small portion of these studies concentrate solely on Chinese international students (e.g. Bamber, 2014; Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007; Liu, 2015; Liu, Elston, & Zhou, 2014; Yang, 2007). Most of the literature however, does not distinguish whether the factor influences study abroad in general or for particular overseas study destinations (i.e. specific countries or regions).

My research has uncovered however, that improving their English language skills is for the primary motivation for most Chinese students to head overseas for study. One key piece of research (Liu, 2015) is from the viewpoint of Mazzarol and Soutar’s push-pull theory (2002), to compare existing China-based research and overseas-based studies. It discovered that improving English was not a major factor for Chinese students choosing to go abroad, but that it was however a motivator for where they chose to go, which is different from the findings in my research.

7.3 Gaining International (Intercultural) Experience

Another leading factor behind Chinese students choosing overseas study, from a more socio-cultural point of view, is their desire to gain international or intercultural experience. This item was ranked quite high by survey respondents (with a mean value = 4.2), which made it the second highest factor among the eight reasons for why they chose to study overseas in the

questionnaire. Comparatively speaking, the mean score of this factor was slightly lower than the item, “improving English”, but nearly 70% of all interviewees reported that they were motivated by this factor when choosing to study overseas.

Gaining international or intercultural experience is vital for broadening the horizons of Chinese students. In the interviewees, they expanded upon this from four different perspectives.

7.3.1 Experiencing New Things

The first dimension was about a yearning to experience new things, which was mentioned by more than half of all interviewees. There was diversity even in the reasoning for this. Some really looked forward to experiencing new things while studying overseas, like overseas university life, or an overseas lifestyle, while others expressed in a more general aspect that they just liked new things, and always wanted to be exposed to new environments. Past research (Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006) has also shown that a search for fresh experiences was a contributing motivation for Chinese students to go abroad, but they found that it was merely a secondary and superfluous benefit. Here however it is evident that this factor is actually a driving force behind Chinese students seeking an overseas educational experience.

7.3.2 Seeing the Western World

The second dimension was related to a desire to see the Western world. For students who had not gone abroad before, there was a longing to go overseas, especially to Western countries. This may be derived from the influence of Western culture in China, particularly on the generation of Chinese in this study born in the 1980s and 1990s, which grew up after the reform and opening-up of China in the year of 1978. One interviewee made a comment on this point, “since I was little, I started to watch American movies, so I longed for a (Western) environment. I really wanted to see what the life of white people was like” (IV12). This reveals that young Chinese people have a desire to understand the “West”, and that they expect to gain a better understanding of Western culture through an international education. This assertion also aligns with previous studies (Griner & Sobol, 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

7.3.3 Travel

Travel was the third dimension, and was mentioned by four interviewees. It was not a driving force behind their decision, but it was an attraction pulling them towards overseas study. They reported a clear conviction that there is a special advantage to study abroad when compared with short-term overseas trips. One interviewee stated, “staying here to study for a year is different from travelling here for a month. I wanted to stay overseas for a long period, rather than have a cursory sightseeing experience, so I thought studying overseas would be a good idea” (IV3). Studying abroad can provide people with a long period of time abroad, and can open up a great opportunity for “in-depth travel”.

This is not a new idea. Since ancient times China has encouraged people to travel and gain more experience, knowledge and a broader perspective. There is a Chinese saying that claims that, “you can learn more from travelling thousands of miles than from reading thousands of books” (读万卷书不如行万里路, *dú wàn juǎn shū bù rú xíng wàn lǐ lù*). This research confirms that this ancient idea is still at work today, even now in the globalised modern world. This idea of foreign study being seen as a kind of travel is in line with prior research (Sánchez et al., 2006).

7.3.4 Getting Valuable Experience

The fourth dimension was associated with getting valuable life experience. Interview participants viewed international experience as a way to enrich and benefit their lives.

If you have an overseas study experience, you really improve (as a person). Some people start businesses after high school, and they become successful a few years earlier than you, but they do not experience overseas study throughout their whole life. This study experience is more important than any kind of wealth which you can have in the future. (IV8)

This reveals that Chinese people have become aware of the significance of intercultural competence and global participation. Accordingly, they can see that studying abroad might be an opportunity for them to truly become a global citizen, while experiencing a transnational life. This point is consistent with findings of previous studies (Chang, 2015; Hobsons APAC, 2015).

7.4 Higher Quality Education Compared With China

Higher quality education is a fairly crucial academically driven factor which influenced Chinese international student choices about foreign study. It presented as the third most significant reason for choosing overseas study, with a mean score of 3.99. This reason was also specifically highlighted by more than one quarter of interviewees.

Interestingly, the majority of interviewees touched on this factor in the reverse, that is, through complaints about the quality of Chinese higher education, instead of reflecting on the high quality of overseas education. These interviewees echoed insights from previous research (Bamber, 2014; Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007; Liu et al., 2014), which found that there was a correlation between the low quality of Chinese higher education and the decision to studying abroad. This research offers a more comprehensive interpretation of this observation.

Specific reasons mentioned by interviewees about their views of academic standards centred on two points. First, three interviewees perceived that they could not learn much in Chinese universities, whether that was at a bachelor’s level or in higher degree programs. Two concerns

they had with the Chinese education system instigated this. On the one hand, they stated that knowledge taught at Chinese universities was not aligned well with the skills employers sought. That is, bachelor's degree courses were full of redundancies in theoretical knowledge rather than delivering employability skills and knowledge. Furthermore, students enrolled in higher degree programs were primarily working for their supervisors rather than able to do their own original research. Interviewees were also discontented with the low quality of teaching at Chinese universities, especially in bachelor's courses. This might be because Chinese universities tended to emphasise more on research, and less on teaching.

Another reason given for concern about Chinese tertiary education was that students are dissatisfied with the overall "Chinese university atmosphere". One interviewee noted:

But when I was in the third-year of my bachelor's degree, the course was becoming boring, because I felt that the teaching quality was declining at that time. In addition, I saw fourth-year students who had nothing to do,¹ so I could not bear that kind of atmosphere. So I thought I need to study abroad. (IV16)

Some participants reflected straightforwardly on their pre-study preconceptions, saying that they simply believed they would receive a better quality education overseas. More specifically, they believed that more knowledge, like employability skills and general knowledge could be gained while studying abroad. This finding is identical with that from previous research (Griner & Sobol, 2014; Liu, 2015; Liu et al., 2014; Yang, 2007).

7.5 Learning to Be Independent

Learning to be independent is an underlying personal reason motivating some Chinese students to leave their homeland and pursue higher education abroad. With a mean score of 3.61, this factor ranked No.4 amongst all eight influencing reasons to study overseas. 63.9% of survey respondents (see Table 7.1) believed that this was a "very important" or an "important" factor which had guided them in their decision.

In line with the survey results, interview participants also mentioned that learning to be independent was a factor at play when they decided to study overseas. It was portrayed by them however as a secondary factor rather than a more dominant one. Interviewees reported that gaining an "out of the comfort zone" experience was very important for becoming an independent and mature person. In order to disrupt the comfortable kind of life that had been provided to them by their parents in China, they wanted to depend on their own abilities and live and explore overseas. One male interviewee commented: "I firmly believe even if this overseas experience is not successful, it is still a good try" (IV19).

Within the current relevant literature only Yang's paper titled "what attracts mainland Chinese

¹ Note: The duration of Chinese bachelor's degree courses is usually four years.

students to Australian higher education” (2007) has identified that learning to be independent was a factor behind students’ choice to study abroad. The results here tie in well with this finding, but detailed interviewees are provided here, so that this factor can be clearly interpreted multi-dimensionally.

7.6 Raising Social Status

The desire to raise one’s social status is a more socio-cultural and personal reason for studying overseas. Survey respondents did not rank this factor very high, with a mean of just 3.41; the sixth reason among the eight listed. In terms of the significance of this factor, only 14.2% of responses deemed it as a “very important” factor in their choice of study so far away from home. The highest percentage of survey respondents (38.6% amongst the five points of the Likert scales for this factor), rated it as an “important” factor. However, there still was 32.2% of replies which showed it as “unimportant” to them.

Combining the mean value and the distribution of survey responses together indicates that this factor was not a dominant driver for most Chinese students when making their decision to study overseas. This was also proved during discussions with survey responders. Three interviewees made some reference to this point. They utilised terms like “saving face” or “winning credit” rather than specifically mentioning “raising status”. The idea behind these expressions however is still centred on raising personal status, especially in a social sense. Consequently, it would not be unreasonable to view “raising social status” as encompassing these ideas.

All three interview participants stated that studying abroad was an honour for them, which was mentioned as an underlying factor in the last chapter. Here too, interviewees admitted that university qualifications gained overseas are often perceived as better than those earned domestically.

Two beliefs from Chinese culture can be seen as underlying this view. The first is that studying overseas can be a face-saving behaviour. The term, “face” (面子, miàn zi) plays a very significant role in Chinese culture. Face stands for “a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation. This is prestige that is accumulated by means of personal effort or clever manoeuvring” (Hu, 1944, p. 45). Comments related to this were made by one interviewee: “My original thought was very simple. If I study abroad, I can put a lot of stuff on my Facebook page.... Without a doubt, studying overseas will save me face after I go back [hometown]” (IV1).

Another belief is that the pursuit of overseas higher education not only benefits the individual, but can win credit for one’s parents within their wider family network. In China, comparisons can prevail inside big families. People attempt to be better off than their relatives in both financial and material ways. One interview participant stated this phenomenon like this:

The second reason was that I wanted to save face for my parents. This was 50%

of the reason for me to choose to study abroad. People in [the Chinese province] have a very strong sense of family. My whole family is engaged in [a business]. Most people in the generations of my whole family have graduated from junior schools and then chosen to run their own businesses. This was a trend in my hometown. If I chose to study, I would bring a halo to my parents, to this small family within the bigger family network. (IV17)

The above facts all clearly show that Chinese students can be motivated to raise not only their own social status, but that of their family as well. Middle and upper class children are the majority of fee-paying overseas higher education students, and in China, these are called the “rich second generation” (富二代, fù èr dài). Their families are usually newly rich, because their parents were the first generation to run businesses and become wealthy after the Chinese economic reform of 1979 (before 1979, it was illegal for people to have a private business in China). Although there is a middle and upper class in China today, parents still attempt to improve their non-material level in order to eventually raise their social status. Sending their children overseas to study abroad is one approach for raising the social status of individuals and even of whole families.

This motivation for foreign study has also been found in a substantial body of previous research (e.g. Griner & Sobol, 2014; Li & Bray, 2007; Sánchez et al., 2006). The research in this study also provides new evidence to illustrate the ongoing nature of this factor.

7.7 Seeking Freedom

Seeking out more freedom is a personal and social motivation for Chinese students to choose an international higher education. Survey respondents selected this reason with a mean value of 3.36, the sixth in terms of importance for them. In this way, seeking freedom may be considered one among several reasons that Chinese students choose to study overseas, but it is not a particularly decisive one, being ranked in the middle.

Interviews also supported this understanding, where only three participants overtly stated that a desire to gain more freedom was part of their motivation for foreign study. These three mentioned three reasons for this. The first was to escape from their parents’ control, or their parents’ arrangement for their lives. The role of parents within traditional Chinese culture is to “govern” and “train” their child so that they become successful. Parents are therefore willing to prepare everything for their child, whether the child likes it or not. Perhaps understandably, it can cause children at times to want to escape this kind of restriction.

My parents had arranged a future job for me. Before I decided to study abroad, my parents told me what job I would get after graduation from university. I thought that this job would be tedious, and I did not want my life to be like that. If I had been very traditional, I would have followed the road that my parents had paved. But I wanted my life to be different from what they planned, so I

chose to study abroad. (IV19)

Second, in the interviews students also stated that studying abroad was a way to find a fairer environment. For example: “Before coming abroad, I thought that an overseas social environment would be better (and fairer) than China’s.... I did not like China’s social environment, so I wanted to escape from it” (IV12). This too then is an expressed desire to seek freedom from perceived constraints of Chinese society.

The third reason associated with gaining freedom was raised by higher degree students in the social sciences and was more academic in nature. Interviewees stated that they would rather go overseas to study subjects in social sciences, due to restrictions in these fields in China, such as limited topics about what could be the object of study. These restrictions can lead to opportunities being limited for students in this field. Studying abroad represents the idea of academic freedom for those students, and it offers a chance for them to achieve it.

In the existing literature there is little mention of this desire to seek freedom other than in the work of Sánchez, Fornerino, and Zhang (2006), who discovered that a desire to study abroad could be viewed as an opportunity to taste personal freedom away from guardians or family. My study found the same, but also revealed two other interpretations on freedom which are of a social and academic nature.

7.8 Difficulty Gaining Entry Into Higher Education in China

Difficulty gaining entry into higher education in China is also an academic issue driving the flow of Chinese students to a higher education in other nations. It was surprising that this factor ranked fairly low in the written survey based on its mean score (2.91), the seventh out of eight reasons.

Of the interviewees however, a large proportion of them (61%), expressed that difficulty in getting into a Chinese university was a reason that they choose overseas study. This wide difference in responses between the survey and interviews may be due to the negative way in which this factor was worded in the questionnaire. Survey respondents might have been more likely to favour a positive expression than a negative one in representing their personal situation.

7.8.1 A Lack of Access to Higher Education in China

There were two different types of interview participants who expressed a desire for further study, but who also mentioned a high level of competition in China. Both types will be described below.

The first type of respondents had been willing to receive higher education in China but lacked access to it. In other words, they could not meet the high entry requirements of those degree

courses so they chose to gain the degree overseas. This reflects the inadequate supply of university places in China and the high number of applicants vying for a limited number of places there. The entry level requirement for all levels of higher education in China is to pass entrance examinations. Those exams are hyper-competitive and difficult. Some respondents had sat for those exams but failed. Such results can only be used in the same year that they are awarded, and not for the following year's application, so failure meant that those students would have to sit those exams again for the next year, or look elsewhere.

The other students had not even attended those exams, predicting that they had a high possibility of failing them based on their previous academic performance, so they chose to avoid competition altogether. Instead, they chose to pursue a place at an overseas university. This group included applicants for bachelor's degree as well as higher degree seekers.

While China's higher education has undergone a sharp expansion more recently (Li, Whalley, & Xing, 2014; Liu et al., 2014), competition to gain admittance is still an issue as seen in the above responses in this research.

7.8.2 Difficulty Gaining Entry Into a High-Quality Degree in China

The second type of Chinese student had sought entrance into a top university in China, but due to harsh competition could not gain access. This happened not only for bachelor's degree seekers but also for students who had attempted to enter Chinese master's programs. Some interviewees said variations of the following; "If I had passed the entrance exams for a master's degree course in a prestigious Chinese university, I would not have chosen to study abroad" (IV14).

Other participants however stated that they, or their parents had believed that the value of a foreign-earned degree would be greater than that of a degree gained from an ordinary university in China, and therefore they chose to pursue an international higher education.

I did not want to enrol in a postgraduate course in my previous university, because it was not a very good university in China. The purpose for getting a master's degree is to get a decent job in the future. If you studied very hard for the entrance exams in China, you would expect to enrol into a good Chinese postgraduate school, but their ranks were much lower than overseas universities where you did not need to study hard to enrol. That is why I chose to study abroad. (IV21)

7.8.3 Limited Choices in Specialist Fields in Chinese Higher Education

Another group of Chinese students were interested in specialist fields but also found it difficult to gain entry into higher education in China due to limited choices in Chinese universities, and high entry requirements. One interviewee noted, "only one university in [hometown] has a

course for seafarers, but it is very difficult to enter. You need to get a lot of credits” (IV1). These students with a global vision ended up seeking opportunities in those particular specialist fields overseas in the pursuit of their dreams. This will be discussed further in Chapter 10: results and discussion for theme–UTAS.

Choosing to study overseas due to difficulties entering the Chinese higher education system is consistent with the findings of considerable other studies from previous years (Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007; Liu et al., 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Sánchez et al., 2006; Stafford, 2010; Yang, 2007; Yao, 2004). In comparison with those studies, the findings in my research, while preliminary, contribute to a more in-depth analysis of the issue, and uncover underlying factors behind this particular motivation for foreign study.

7.9 Following the Trend to Study Overseas

Following an existent trend to study overseas also influence the decision of some Chinese students to study internationally, which is more of a socio-cultural and economic issue. Survey respondents recorded a mean of just 2.81 for this factor, the last of all eight reasons why they chose overseas study. Its lower rank however might be misleading to some extent, since a large proportion, roughly half of all the interviewees, admitted that following the trend to study abroad was an important driver behind their own decisions.

A question can be posed here about why there is such a difference between quantitative and qualitative data results. The first possible reason might be the wording in the questionnaire. Respondents might have thought that it was communicating mere conformity to the choices of others. This would have cast their decision in a negative light, rather than making it seem like a positive and active resolution made by the students themselves. Overall, survey respondents tended to agree with questions posed in a positive light, and disagreed with ones that sounded negative. Second, interviewees provided different types of interpretations on this issue, but none of them used the specific phrasing of the question. This could imply that some Chinese students might not be fully aware that they were following a trend at all.

Interviewees discussed a wide range of trends that motivated them to study across borders, the dominant influence being from their families. Many of them indicated that relatives in their families who were of similar age were studying, or had studied overseas previously, so this developed as a trend for other family members to follow. Also, they mentioned, those relatives who had studied abroad had become fairly successful and outstanding in their studies and their career afterwards. Interviewees therefore saw this kind of overseas higher education as potentially contributing to their own future achievement, and their role models had encouraged them to pursue it.

The power of these role models was much greater than mere encouragement as well. Interviewees revealed that they not only were motivated by these role models, but that they deliberately followed the exact same path as them, by using for example, the same education

agency, applying to the same overseas university, and sometimes even choosing the same major.

Other participants stated that rather than following family examples, they had chosen to study overseas by following geographical trends, such as a history of overseas study in their hometown, or even trends in the devaluation of foreign currencies after the subprime mortgage crisis. All of these trends indicate ideas of collectivism and group orientation, undoubtedly stemming from CHC, and still playing a pivotal role in educational decisions of the younger generation of Chinese students.

Previous studies have not taken into account trends as a factor behind Chinese student decisions to study overseas. Nevertheless, some relevant research (e.g. Griner & Sobol, 2014; Liu, 2015; Liu et al., 2014) has shown that “sea turtles” (海归, returnees from overseas study, hǎi guī) who come back to China from studying abroad tend to receive better salaries than local graduates and end up in leadership roles. This has had a significant impact on other Chinese students when deciding to pursue an overseas higher education. My study picks this phenomenon up too, but more importantly, it has discovered that “following a trend to study overseas” can consist of multidimensional perspectives, such as influence from family, society or the economy.

7.10 Other Influencing Factors

In both the survey and the interviews the above eight factors have been revealed as key motivators for Chinese students choosing to study abroad. There are however other key reasons which contribute to Chinese students studying abroad, which surfaced in the interviews and the open-ended section of the questionnaire. These will be considered below.

7.10.1 Influence From Parents, Relatives or Friends

Parents, relatives and friends also have a strong influence on the educational decisions of Chinese students. This was identified as an important issue by more than two thirds of interviewees, and some respondents of the open-ended questionnaire section. That is, parents, family and friends clearly play a crucial role in influencing Chinese students to study internationally.

There were two types of roles that parents played. The first was to decide on behalf of their child, which was acknowledged by almost one third of the interview participants. In facing such a complex, expensive and life-changing choice, Chinese children were most likely to exhibit an unquestioned compliance with the decision of their parents. This phenomenon was apparent among interviewees who were under the age of 18 when they decided to study overseas, but it was also seen for students who had been undergraduates at Chinese universities and decided on more education. Filial piety is highly valued within Chinese culture, and so Chinese parents can be the “gatekeepers” of important decisions for their child even until the end of their life.

The negative reason forcing me to study abroad was my family (parents). My scores of the National College Entrance Examination were very low, so I did not have a lot of choices for my study destination.... My parents thought that I could not get a bachelor's degree in China, so they wanted me to study abroad to get the degree. But in my mind, I did not want to study abroad very much, but I only wanted to fulfil their dream. I accepted their decision due to filial piety. (IV7)

The other type of parental involvement was more consensual in manner, and these parents suggested or encouraged their child to study overseas. One fifth of the interview participants acknowledged this, indicating the increasingly open discussions that must be occurring in Chinese families in recent years, and that there are significant interactions occurring between parents and their children in relation to making important family decisions. Amongst these interviewees, some reported that they had actually initiated the idea of overseas study, rather than their parents. In other cases, it was the parents who had suggested their child study overseas due to for example, the parent's unfulfilled dream to study overseas, so the child had decided to strike a balance between their own wishes and that of their parents.

Apart from the impact of parents, there were also word-of-mouth referrals from overseas relatives which had a significant influence on decisions for foreign study. Overseas relatives who have a good life overseas can make suggestions about studying there by describing the strengths of the countries they live in. Others who hold a higher degree from an overseas university had explained the benefits of studying abroad. Being overseas, the suggestions and advice of these relatives is deemed highly valuable when the students made their choices for study, since it is "first-hand information" based on reliable eye witnesses in the foreign locations.

Chinese students construct their views about overseas study through a broader network of influences than just their families. Students who are mature in age do not usually follow their parents' decisions, but they accept suggestions from friends. Particularly when being confused about the future, they accepted ideas initiated by friends about pursuing an overseas education, or they were inspired by their friends when they saw them preparing for overseas study.

Influence from parents as an important factor is consistent with past literature (e.g. Bodycott, 2009; Chang, 2015; Griner & Sobol, 2014; Hobsons APAC, 2015; Songguo, 2001). The highlight of this finding about parental influence differs from previous research, however, because of the differences in parental influence on different age groups seen in my study. Also, there has been little discussion in the literature about relatives and friends also acting as influencers in the Chinese students' decision making.

7.10.2 Saving Time

Saving time, as in the number of years needed to study, is also an issue that motivated a number of students to study overseas. This was mentioned by five participants in interview

conversations. They stated that undertaking an overseas degree would help them save time compared to doing a similar degree program in China. Two of these were taking bachelor's degrees, while another three were in master's degree programs. In China an undergraduate degree lasts four years and a master's degree usually entails three years of full-time study. The two bachelor's degree seekers had received a diploma previously in China, so they chose a faster way to upgrade to a bachelor's degree. The three master's students clearly stated that they would save six months to one year by undertaking a master's degree course overseas.

In addition, concerns about saving time were raised by females, which revealed a gender-based difference between students. Out of the five interviewees who mentioned time saving as a motivator for overseas study, four were female. Chinese society widely believes that women should finish their university degrees as soon as possible so that they can then take on a female role, such as getting married and having children. There is a fear in public of the term *shengnv* (剩女, shèng nǚ), which means woman "left on the shelf". In other words, women who are unmarried and remain too long in higher education (Bamber, 2014). Also, this negative perception has developed into a gender bias in the Chinese labour market. Studying for a shorter period of time therefore is a neat solution for Chinese women. One female interviewee commented on this quite straightforwardly:

The length of a master's degree course in China is three years, while here it is only two years. It could save one year for me. There is a big difference between girls whose ages have one-year difference in their 20s when hunting for a job.
(IV9)

There is a scarcity of existing research (Bamber, 2014) on the influence of time saving as a motivation for Chinese students when they pursue an overseas education. The study from Bamber (2014) is the only one which paid special attention to the fact that saving time had motivated Chinese women to undertake one-year master's program in the U.K. My research here has developed Bamber's finding (1) into a bigger context, that is, overseas; (2) into more levels of higher education, involving master's degrees and bachelor's degrees; (3) and further across gender boundaries, by including both females and males.

7.10.3 Future Employment Prospects

Some Chinese students are also motivated by future employment prospects, a socio-economic and personal issue. Of all 23 interviewees in this study, four clearly indicated that pursuing an international higher education would enhance their future employment prospects. This mainly concentrated on obtaining more, or better future employment opportunities.

In terms of more employment chances, two master's degree students realised that the supply of Chinese master's graduates exceeded the demand for them from Chinese employers, so that people who had a master's degree from a Chinese university found it very difficult to secure a job. Interviewees reflected on the fact that seniors they know who have master's degrees from

Chinese top universities still cannot get an ideal job. The survey respondents believed that receiving an overseas higher education would give them the upper hand in the Chinese work force and allow them to stand out from their job competitors.

In this way, gaining an overseas higher education can bring about better future employment opportunities. The attraction of seeking education elsewhere is due to factors such as a more competitive salary and higher employment rate in foreign countries compared with China. Others who chose to study overseas had very clear career goals. Usually, a university qualification itself or qualification-related overseas study experience was the pre-requisite for a job promotion for those people.

Only a small proportion of existing research (Bodycott, 2009; Griner & Sobol, 2014) focuses on employment after study. However, this study agrees with the findings in Griner and Sobol's work (2014), in that Chinese students are motivated by the belief that studying overseas can help them find a job. These findings here however are not consistent with results in Bodycott's study (2009), since students in his study did not rate the future employment prospects as important in considering overseas study. This may be due to the time lapse between his research and this study. His investigation was undertaken before 2009, while this research was done after 2015. The more rapid economic development in China after 2009 might have resulted in more intense competition in the labour market, which consequently is now affecting young Chinese people's confidence towards job hunting.

7.10.4 Other Factors

The investigation in this research also uncovered other factors behind Chinese student choices to study overseas, these covered issues such as a future immigration opportunity, or being in a joint education program between a previous Chinese university and UTAS. Those motivations were more directly related to other decision-making choices for Chinese international students. Hence, these two factors will be discussed later in more relevant chapters.

7.11 Conclusion

These results and discussion from the second choice facet of the literature-derived framework for making choices, studying overseas for Chinese international students, has been fully covered in this chapter through the interpretation of underlying motivations extracted from surveys and interviews. Results and discussion pertinent to the 13 motivations outlined in this chapter have helped partly address the first research question (what are the factors influencing the choices of Chinese international students in their decision to enrol in a regional Australian university?), for the primary objective of this research (to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university).

It was found that Chinese students are influenced by 13 crucial factors, from academic, economic, social, cultural, and personal issues, when choosing to pursue higher education

overseas:

- Improving English language ability
- Gaining international (intercultural) experience
 - Experience new things
 - Seeing the Western World
 - Travel
 - Getting valuable experience
- Higher quality education compared with China
- Learning to be independent
- Raising social status
- Seeking freedom
- Difficulty gaining entry into higher education in China
 - A lack of access to higher education in China
 - Difficulty gaining entry into a high-quality degree in China
 - Limited choices in specialist fields in Chinese higher education
- Following the trend to study overseas
- Influence from parents, relatives or friends
- Saving time
- Future employment prospects
- A future immigration opportunity
- Joint education programs

Chapter 8 Results and Discussion for Theme– Australia

8.1 Introduction

After having explored the motivations for Chinese international students to pursue a higher education and to undertake it overseas, this chapter will now attempt to examine the third choice in the logic of the literature-derived framework for making choices (see Figure 8.1). That is, what has influenced Chinese international students to pick a certain country, Australia as their overseas higher education destination, and not any other countries.

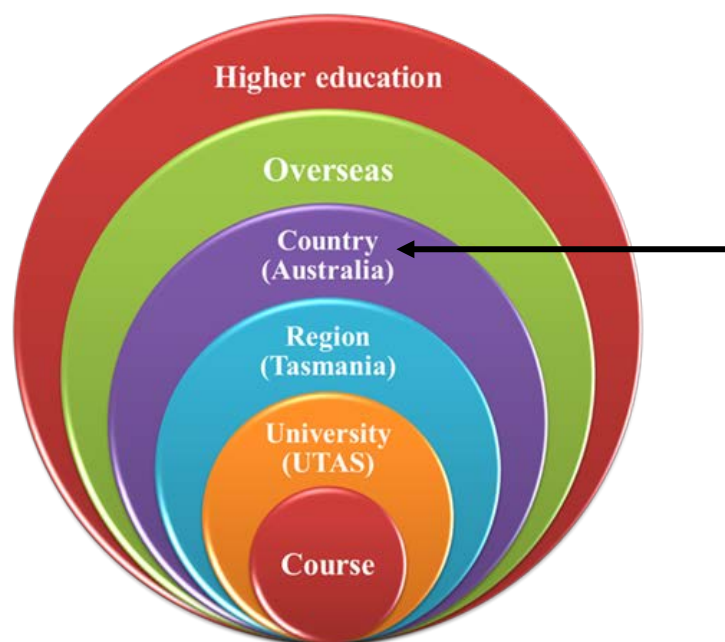


Figure 8.1. The choice of choosing country (Australia) within the literature-derived framework for making choices.

To uncover these motivations, the relevant data were gathered through the survey and the interview. In the survey, Chinese international students were directly asked “the reasons why you picked Australia as your study destination,” with possible responses being 10 prepared potential answer items, as well as an open-ended section. The descriptive statistics summary of the survey data for Australia as the choice destination is shown in Table 8.1. Factors are listed based on the sequence from the smallest mean value to the largest. Eventually, 459 respondents answered this survey question.

Table 8.1

Descriptive Statistics Summary of the Survey Data for the Choice–Australia¹

Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
An English-speaking country	4.18	0.758	34.0%	53.8%	9.6%	1.3%	1.3%
Environmental considerations like climate, lifestyle	4.04	0.971	34.9%	44.9%	13.7%	2.6%	3.9%
Safety and low racial discrimination	3.86	1.072	29.4%	42.5%	18.5%	3.5%	6.1%
Future immigration opportunity	3.78	1.156	30.5%	37.5%	19.6%	4.8%	7.6%
Good reputation for higher education in the world	3.67	0.973	14.2%	53.6%	23.7%	1.7%	6.8%
Quick and easy student visa application process	3.65	1.116	22.0%	41.2%	25.1%	3.3%	8.5%
Easy to know about Australia or Australian higher education in China	3.56	1.04	13.7%	47.5%	27.9%	2.4%	8.5%
A good place to travel	3.56	1.162	21.6%	37.3%	26.8%	4.8%	9.6%
Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	3.45	1.231	20.9%	33.3%	28.3%	5.0%	12.4%
Family/relatives/friends are living/studying in Australia	2.72	1.447	14.8%	16.8%	27.2%	8.1%	33.1%

23 individual interviews were also conducted to identify some of the key motivations that Chinese students had when selecting Australia as their overseas study destination. These interviews explored answers to the question “why did you decide to pick Australia as your overseas study destination rather than another overseas country?”.

Reasons listed in the questionnaire and the new factors identified in the interviews, as well as the open-ended questionnaire section were all put together and grouped for discussion. The following sections will elaborate on those factors, and compare them with previous research findings.

8.2 An English-Speaking Country

That Australia is an English-speaking country is a highly salient factor influencing student choice about where they want to study. Of all the reasons listed in the questionnaire under the

¹ SD = Standard Deviation; VI = Very Important; I = Important; UI = Unimportant; VUI = Very Unimportant; NC = Never Considered.

question of why you picked Australia as your study destination, this factor ranked the highest, with a mean score of 4.18. A number of interview participants clearly stated that they would only choose to undertake higher education in an English-speaking country, and Australia fitted that precondition of theirs.

As non-native English speakers, students expected to raise their English competency levels in Australia, and this was overtly stated by four interviewees. English proficiency actually needs to be improved for the majority of Chinese students, as English is neither used in daily communication in China, nor is it employed in teaching other disciplines at school. For that reason, almost all interviewees admitted that when they were preparing for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test in order to apply to an Australian university, they had to make considerable efforts to reach the necessary grade, and that they put a great deal of time aside to study by themselves or attend English language cram schools. Choosing to study in Australia can thus help Chinese students while they are studying English in preparation to come, but also when they immerse themselves in an all English environment while living there. In this context they can improve their knowledge and use of the language and greatly improve.

A number of interviewees stated that they had actually been interested originally in pursuing higher education in non-native English-speaking countries, but they had eventually given up on those ideas due to concerns about the language. Some disclosed that they were not good at learning languages, let alone at starting on a new one. Others indicated that it would be very difficult for them to master another foreign language in the short time before they needed to be in that country, or even while there.

I also intended to apply to universities in the Netherlands, but I needed to learn a minority language, Dutch. Although those universities alleged that they adopted an all English teaching mode, I would have to go to the street, watch TV when studying there, so it would be unavoidable to learn that language. If Dutch could not be mastered well, it would affect my life and study there. Thus, I finally chose an English-speaking country, Australia. (IV14)

Higher degree research students also picked Australia due to the concern of the function of English as the first international academic language (see section 7.2).

There is a great deal of research which identifies primary determining factors for destination choices of Chinese international students (Bodycott, 2009; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Griner & Sobol, 2014; Liu, 2015; Yang, 2007). Only two of these studies (Gong & Huybers, 2015; Yang, 2007) narrowed the context down to Chinese international students and their choice of Australia as a study destination. The findings here are in line with those two prior studies, but my research updates the results from the years of 2006 and 2007 to the year of 2015.

Nevertheless, a question remains concerning why Australia is chosen amongst all the English-speaking countries of the world. Reasons for this will be described in the following sections.

8.3 Accessibility of Country

To a large extent, Chinese international students are motivated to choose Australia by its easy accessibility for them. This factor can be divided into two crucial visa-related items, future immigration opportunity, and quick and easy student visa application process. The first item scored 3.78; the latter 3.65, which ranked them respectively as the fourth and sixth most important factors among all 10 available. In terms of their mean values, most survey respondents considered them significant. As expected, the two factors were also mentioned by participants in interviews. To some extent, the two factors fully dominated some interviewees' decisions to study in Australia.

8.3.1 A Future Immigration Opportunity

The possibility and ease of being granted permanent residency (PR) in Australia played a decisive role for more than one third of the interviewees. They had a great desire of their own, or from their parents to pursue PR status in Australia which could be an option if they decided on Australia as a study destination. They stated that after researching the migration policies of different countries, Australia provided students with a PR opportunity after graduation, and Australia was easier to immigrate to in comparison with other Western countries. Students commented on why they did not choose another English-speaking country from the immigration perspective: "Now you cannot immigrate to the U.S.A. after studying there." (IV19); "other situations are similar between studying in Australia and the U.K., but Australia has attached the extra favourable condition of a PR opportunity after graduation. However, the opportunity of immigration to the U.K. is fiercer" (IV20). For this group of students, a future immigration opportunity was a major driving force to not only select Australia, but to also choose to study abroad.

This result has been discovered in several other existing studies (Azmat et al., 2013; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Liu, 2015; Liu et al., 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pacey, 2014; Yang, 2007). However, the work from Azmat et al. (2013) remarked that after some news of international students being attacked in Australia, its attraction offering a package for both receiving an academic qualification and gaining permanent residency was diminished. My research however uncovers the fact that current Chinese international students are still deeply interested in Australian higher education and immigration possibilities, and the effects of negative news have not remained.

8.3.2 A Quick and Easy Student Visa Application Process

Australia's quick and easy student visa application process is very attractive for Chinese international students when considering study destinations. That is, Chinese international students are actively considering the complexity of gaining a student visa, the duration of it, the application process, and longer term opportunities involved. Their view centred on the ease

with which they can get an Australian student visa compared to other countries. Interviewees who had a yearning to study abroad, stated that they were looking for a smooth visa application process, and Australia met these expectations of theirs.

An Australian (student) visa would be easier to apply for. My hometown was among the top three areas in China with a high rejection rate for overseas visa applications. A long time ago, [hometown] was famous for Chinese smugglers into overseas countries, so the Chinese Government took some action to control this bad phenomenon in [hometown]. Thus, I was worried about whether I would be granted a student visa to study abroad. (IV15)

All interviewees who had student visa concerns stated that it would be harder and much slower to get a student visa from another English-speaking country compared to Australia. All of them specifically mentioned visas when they explained why they did not choose to go to the U.S.A. While they were interested in studying in the U.S.A., their American study dream was extinguished immediately upon becoming aware of the difficulty involved in applying for those visas. Compared to the U.S.A., Australia welcomes Chinese international students with open arms.

I did not want to go to the U.S.A. for study, since when I got my new passport and applied for an American visitor visa to travel there, my application was rejected. I felt quite upset. The U.S.A. did not welcome me, so I would not go there. (IV3)

This finding is in line with some previous research (Gong & Huybers, 2015; Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007) on this area, which looked at factors influencing destination choice among international students, and particularly among Chinese international students. This research confirms that this motivation is still prevalent in this new generation of Chinese international students.

In addition, the majority of participants in this study came to Australia after 2011. In 2011, the new streamlined student visa processing system was adopted in Australia after having been recommended in the Knight Review (Knight, 2011). Since then, the student visa processing time has been significantly shortened. A quick and easy student visa application process has worked as a major motivating factor behind Chinese international students selecting Australia from among other English-speaking countries in the world.

8.4 Accessibility of Australian Higher Education

Besides easy accessibility to Australia, Chinese international students studied also took into account the accessibility of the Australian higher education system, since their primary purpose to travel to Australia was for study. This was one of the key points which enabled Australia to beat the international higher education competition in recruiting Chinese international students.

Three relevant issues were identified behind this, namely, joint education programs, competitive costs, and low university entry requirements. Although these three motivations were not items in the questionnaire for respondents to rate, they were specifically elaborated on by a considerable number of interview participants and respondents in the open-ended section of the survey.

8.4.1 Joint Education Programs

Joint education programs have also led Chinese seekers of higher education to Australia. A joint education program refers to a cooperative academic program run by an Australian university and a university from another country, in which students complete their studies initially in that country and then spend some time in Australia, emerging with qualifications from both institutions. All 10 interviewees were in joint education programs between Australia and China, or Australia and Singapore, and spent a large amount of time in the interviews elaborating on their programs, and pointed out that it was the dominant reason for them to have decided on Australia. Also, four respondents of the open-ended section of the questionnaire also affirmed this reason.

Amongst those 10 interview participants, four were from “2+2” joint bachelor’s degree programs which entailed the first two-year of a bachelor’s course in a Chinese university, and then another two-year bachelor’s course at UTAS, which resulted in a UTAS bachelor’s degrees as well as a bachelor’s degree from that Chinese university. One respondent was from a “3+2” joint bachelor-master degree program which involved a three-year bachelor’s course at a Chinese university and then a two-year bachelor-master’s course at UTAS in order to gain two bachelor’s degrees, one from the Chinese university and one from UTAS, as well as a master’s degree from UTAS.

The other half of those 10 were from joint diploma-bachelor’s programs which encompassed a complete diploma course in a Chinese vocational tertiary education (similar to Australia’s TAFE) or a polytechnic in Singapore which conferred two diplomas from both UTAS and China or Singapore, or only one diploma from China or Singapore, and then a one or two-year bachelor’s course at UTAS, resulting in a UTAS bachelor’s degree. Other details about joint education programs will be presented in Chapters 9, 10 and 11.

All of the interviewees involved in joint education programs admitted that their overseas study destination was limited to Australia. For those enrolled in “2+2” or “3+2” joint degree programs, they recognised that they had to come to Australia instead of another country to obtain degrees from both of their universities at the same time.¹

I attended a few education fairs in China where there were university

¹ Chinese students in those joint degree programs could choose to stay in China to complete their course rather than to come to Australia, but only a degree from the Chinese university would be conferred on them.

representatives from the U.S.A., Australia and so on. I went there just to have a look, since I could only come to Australia and only to UTAS. This is because I was already enrolled in this “2+2” joint bachelor’s degree program in China at that time. It would have been impossible for me to quit this program and transfer to another overseas country. (IV12)

For those in joint diploma-bachelor’s programs, coming to Australia was even more important, since it was a fast pathway to upgrade their qualifications from diploma to a degree.

Previous research has not taken into account joint education programs as a motivation for Chinese international students selecting Australia as an overseas higher education destination. Accordingly, this is a fresh finding contributed by this research.

8.4.2 Competitive Costs

As would be expected, competitive costs are a vital factor contributing to a Chinese international student’s choice of overseas study destination. Almost 40% of all interviewees elaborated on the importance of this factor in their decision making. Australia compares favourably with its competitors for international higher education, with a more competitive tuition fee, lower living expenses, and available scholarships all being mentioned by interviewees.

The majority of Chinese international students were self-funded and their financial support came mainly from their parents or families, so they had great concerns about the cost of study. Almost all nine interviewees had a few options for overseas study destination. The most popular being centred on English-speaking countries: the U.S.A., the U.K. and Australia. However, living expenditure and tuition in the U.S.A. and the U.K. were much more expensive than those for Australia. Furthermore, interviewees mentioned that Australian tuition fees and living costs were also more competitive than those of other Asian countries, like South Korea, and Singapore.

The availability of Australian scholarships was also very attractive for them. In the world market of international higher education, the majority of scholarships are offered to international doctoral students, and it is very difficult for international students to obtain scholarships for lower level degrees. However, Australia seems to offer more scholarships for international students who were applying for bachelor’s degrees or master’s degrees.

I considered the U.S.A., but it was too expensive, and it did not offer a stipend for the level of bachelor’s degree. Thus, I could not go to the U.S.A. for study.... I also considered staying in Singapore to do a bachelor’s degree course,¹ but Singapore also did not offer a scholarship for bachelor’s degree seekers, so it would be too expensive. Australia however offered me a scholarship.... Plus, the

¹ This interviewee got his diploma in Singapore.

tuition here was comparatively cheaper. (IV11)

Lower overall costs resulting in Australia being chosen as a study destination is evidenced in abundant literature (Azmat et al., 2013; Bamber, 2014; Chang, 2015; Gong & Huybers, 2015; i-graduate, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Shanka, Quintal, & Taylor, 2006; Yang, 2007). Specific details of tuition fees, day-to-day living costs and availability of scholarships will have changed from the time that these studies were conducted, however, this research has found that low costs still play a significant role in Chinese international students choosing their overseas study destination.

8.4.3 Low University Entry Requirements

Low entry requirements of Australian universities have also attracted Chinese international students, especially in the case of postgraduate seekers. Three postgraduate interviewees and one respondent of the open-ended questionnaire section mentioned this. It was one of the main underlying reasons why Chinese international students also gave up on the U.S.A. as their higher education destination. According to interviewee disclosure, graduate schools in the U.S.A. required the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) scores of prospective applicants, whereas Australian universities did not ask for results from knowledge-based exams.

GRE requires a very high level of English language competence. Additionally, the scores are the standard for sorting prospective postgraduate applicants into different levels of American universities. For these two reasons, applicants, especially non-native English speakers, usually have to invest a great deal of time and effort in preparing for the GRE test. One third of postgraduate interviewees were aware that choosing the U.S.A. as an overseas higher education destination would take a much longer preparation time than Australia, so the U.S.A. was often excluded, while Australia was accepted.

I had to attend TOEFL¹ and GRE tests, and then apply to American graduate schools. My parents thought I would may not be able to pass those tests in the fourth year of my bachelor's degree course in China, so I might have to spend time in preparing for them after getting a bachelor's degree. It would waste my time, so I would be a bit old when I graduate from a postgraduate school. (IV21)

To date no previous research has discovered this fact that low university entry requirements are a factor in international students' choice of overseas study destination. As a result, this is a new finding from this research, uncovered due to the detail of the questionnaire.

8.5 Knowledge of Australian Higher Education

¹ The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is an English language test of non-native speakers who wish to enrol in universities in English-speaking countries, particularly in the U.S.A.

Knowledge of Australian higher education is also a significant factor effectively bringing Chinese international students to Australia. Knowing the standards and the systems of higher education in overseas countries is instrumental for Chinese international students in selecting a destination country. This factor can be divided into two aspects based on the responses: knowledge about the destination country or its higher education system, and students being attracted by the good reputation for higher education in that country. Responses showed that Australia met both expectations.

In the survey, the item that said it is “easy to know about Australia or Australian higher education in China” had a mean score of 3.56, ranking it No.7 amongst the 10 reasons why Chinese international students picked Australia as their study destination. Also, Australia having a “good reputation for higher education in the world” was ranked even higher, at No.5 (with a mean of 3.67).

These survey results were in alignment with interview responses, where 65% of interviewees claimed that they had heard of the good reputation of Australian higher education for a wide range of underlying reasons. Three interviewees indirectly mentioned that it was even slightly easier to know about the Australian higher education in China compared to that of other countries.

8.5.1 A Good Reputation for Higher Education in the World

In this way, a good reputation for higher education in the world motivate many Chinese international students to choose Australia, principally for two reasons, first, that it is ranked high among the universities of the world, and second, because it has a world-class quality of higher education.

Interviewees made statements like the following; “the teaching quality in Australian higher education is quite good. Australian university rankings are quite high in the world.” (IV9), and “Chinese education agencies said that all Australian universities have a similarly high-quality of education.” (IV6). This is in line with other research (Choi & Nieminen, 2013; Gong & Huybers, 2015), where university rankings in host countries were considered by Chinese international students as a crucial standard for measuring it as a destination. This has been attributed to brand-consciousness in the market in China (Fam & Gray, 2000; Hui, 2005; Yang, 2007).

Moreover, in considering the university rankings of a host country, Australia’s universities generally did better than universities in China. For example, take the 2016 Academic Ranking of World Universities published by Shanghai Jiaotong University as an example. In that list, out of Australia’s 40 universities, 23 were in the top 500 universities in the world; while the top 500 only incorporated 54 universities from the 2,491 Chinese higher education institutions, and 830 Chinese postgraduate institutions (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2013).

In the same way, more than half of the interview participants focused on Australia's reputation for world-class high-quality education. Students had a range of perceptions about this. First, the "studious" atmosphere of Australia is a key attraction, especially for Chinese underachievers. One interviewee remarked that Australia had a better environment for study than the U.S.A.

Lots of children of my mother's friends became very bad in America, like taking drugs or doing bad things.... My parents were afraid that I would also become bad, so they chose Australia as my overseas study destination. Australia does not have a bad reputation. (IV8)

Second, Chinese international students are attracted by the characteristic teaching and learning styles used by Australian universities. One interviewee said, "I felt Australian education quality would be different from China's, since Australian universities have lectures and tutorials, and they have small sized classes" (IV20). Another interviewee liked the relaxed atmosphere of teaching and learning in Australian higher education.

Third, degrees from Australian universities are seen as quite valuable, which is in alignment with Liu's study (2015). This is a reason that Chinese students did not pick the U.K. as their overseas study destination.

Lots of Chinese have qualifications from the U.K. That is not a good thing. In 2013, I watched a Chinese recruitment show. On that show, one boss said: "Sorry, in my firm, a master's degree from the U.K. is equal to a bachelor's degree from China". So now the reputation of the U.K. international higher education in China is not good. (IV23)

There has been considerable literature demonstrating the fact that Australia has a good reputation for higher education in the world, and that this is a factor behind international students choosing it for study (Azmat et al., 2013; DET, 2017c; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Hobsons APAC, 2015; Hobsons Solutions, 2016; i-graduate, 2014; Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pacey, 2014; Yang, 2007). This study supplements these results and provides detailed responses from research participants on this point.

8.5.2 Easy to Know About Australia or Australian Higher Education in China

It is easy to know about Australia or Australian higher education in China, and this definitely influences Chinese international students' decisions. Chinese international students however, were not fully aware of this factor, which may explain why it rated low in the questionnaire and only a few interviewees indirectly mentioned it. Actually, interviews usually only implied that they benefited from this factor when choosing an overseas study destination. They indicated that Australia or Australian higher education was comparatively easier to know about in China than the higher education of another country, like that of New Zealand or European

countries.

I could choose to study in Australia or New Zealand. The benefit in applying to universities in New Zealand was that universities there did not require IELTS scores.... But IELTS was required for Australian university applications. I finally chose Australia as my study destination because I did not know New Zealand very well, but I knew a few famous Australian universities at that time. (IV17)

This finding in the present study is consistent with the push-pull theory from Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), and it is one of the results of the ISS 2016 analysed by Hobsons Solutions (2016).

8.6 Social Links

Social links are also one of the key factors influencing the decisions of Chinese international students about their study destination. In comparison with other influencing factors, this one involves several other decision makers. Social links include input from influencers, like family (parents, relatives), social networks (friends, education agents), and past Australian experiences. This issue was addressed by two items in the questionnaire: “parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it” and “family/relatives/friends are living/studying in Australia”.

The mean value of the first question was 3.45, which ranked No.9 of the 10 listed reasons in the survey. However, 54.2% of survey respondents still deemed it as a “very important”, or an “important” reason. The other factor, “family/relatives/friends are living/studying in Australia” scored 2.72, ranked bottom of all items. The response distribution for this factor was quite even for “important”, “unimportant”, and “never considered”. This was understandable, since the Chinese international students who did not have an Australian connection would rate the item “unimportant” and “never considered”. The third factor, past Australian experiences was a psycho-social link, identified by interviewees. These responses to this factor will be explained in more detail below.

8.6.1 Influence From Parents, Relatives, Education Agents or Friends

Parents, relatives, education agents and friends are significant influencers when Chinese students are making a decision for future overseas study. Five interviewees identified the significance of word-of-mouth referrals coming from one of those five mentioned decision makers.

Parents influence the choice of an overseas destination country not only for bachelor’s degree seekers, but also for those looking abroad for a master’s program. Three interviewees stated that Australia was their parents’ decision or plan for them. Students under 18 years old did not have any ideas on how to make such an important decision, so they agreed on their parents’

ideas to study in Australia. Additionally, parental suggestions about Australia as a potential destination were made on the basis of future immigration opportunities, or safety concerns. All three revealed that their parents had a long-term plan for them to immigrate to Australia. Of those three, one mentioned that her parents mainly concentrated on safety and therefore they decided on Australia, although this was against her own personal aspirations. Chinese international students accept parental decisions due to filial piety (see section 6.8.1 and section 7.10.1).

Parents are not the only ones influencing students, but relatives, education agents and friends can comprise a think tank as well, providing valuable and useful ideas about potential overseas study destinations for Chinese international students. Suggestions from well-educated relatives were always accepted by the Chinese international students questioned, since they perceived that ideas from those relatives were valuable, based on the relatives' own past successful education experience. Also, positive first-hand information about Australia from relatives or friends in Australia often inspired Chinese international students to choose Australia as their study destination. This will be elaborated upon more in the next section.

For those Chinese students who did not have an overseas connection or experienced relatives, the referral from an education agent played the significant role of gatekeeper for their choice of overseas study destination. This decision was made based on information of the situation overseas, and education agents were widely acknowledged as a useful way to collect information and access professional consultation. Parents are always involved in the conversation with education agents to help make the final decision to study elsewhere.

There has been a body of literature already considering this factor (Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Prugsamatz, Pentecost, & Ofstad, 2006; Yang, 2007). This research provides updated information on it with data from a new generation of Chinese international students.

8.6.2 Family or Friends in Australia

Five interviewees also had family or friends in Australia, and chose to come to Australia based on that fact. Having parents or siblings in Australia pulled these interview participants to Australia as an opportunity to be with them again. A Chinese young person can depend on his or her parents in Australia if they choose to pursue a higher education here. Chinese parents would actually prefer all of their children to study in the same overseas country so that they could take care of each other, which was the case for another respondent.

Some students had the promise of care and support from their parents' friends, which ultimately lead to them picking Australia. In the Chinese context, these friends lie in the realm of *guanxi* (关系, *guān xì*), which is a network of interpersonal connections in the Western sense. *Guanxi* is as important as family relationships where people expect to get sufficient support, since good *guanxi* with people can provide resources and protection (Xin & Pearce, 1996). Chinese international students believe that they can depend upon their parents' *guanxi*. One commented,

“a friend of my parents is in Australia. Not only could he arrange an educational institution in Australia for me, but I could also go and seek help from him if I encounter some difficulties there in the future” (IV13).

Another pull force for Chinese international students is from relatives. This may be culturally specific. In Chinese extended families, the relationship is very delicate. Family members love each other, but also tend to compete with each other. In other words, each small family attempts to live better than the other members of their wider family. If children in some families study in an overseas country, the same generation of those children will have suggested to them to study abroad. This is rooted in comparisons prevailing inside Chinese people’s large families (see section 7.6).

Peers in Australia have also influenced Chinese international students in their choice of country. On one hand, the students intend to follow the trend that their friends set and study in Australia. This is to create a sense of belonging and gain conformity with their peers. On the other hand, studying in the same country with their peers can be beneficial for them, as they can get support from their peers residing there.

The findings in this study are in line with existing research (Azmat et al., 2013; Bodycott, 2009; Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007). However, the major distinction of this research is that it has provided more details behind the previously identified motivating factors.

8.6.3 Past Australian Experiences

Past Australian experiences also act as a powerful incentive for Chinese international students to come back to Australia for study. Unlike the tangible features of the two social links mentioned above, as an implicit, intangible and psychologically-oriented factor, past pleasant Australian experiences prove to have left a deep and favourable impression upon Chinese international students, and to thereby influence their decision to study here. Past Australian experiences include both study and travel experiences. One interviewee travelled to Australia once and loved what she saw, and liked it so much that she decided to undertake a higher degree course in Australia in order to extend her experience.

In a summer holiday during my bachelor’s course at a Chinese university, I travelled to Australia with my parents.... Adelaide was so beautiful.... It was a perfect city, and its city planning was perfect. I visited [university] and [university] in South Australia. My parents hoped I could study there in the future. From this perfect visit experience, I made the decision to study in Australia. (IV6)

Only one study (Prugsamatz et al., 2006) has investigated past experiences as a force that drawing Chinese people to return to Australia for study. This study extends this finding into a broader group which includes both undergraduate and postgraduate degree students.

8.7 Environmental Considerations

Different contextual aspects of Australia have also had a positive influence on Chinese international students when deciding a country for their tertiary level study. From this investigation, it has been found that the natural, socio-cultural, and academic environments of Australia have attracted Chinese international students. This section will discuss only the first two of these, since the academic environment has been elaborated on in section 8.5.1.

The item, “environmental considerations like climate, lifestyle” was the second significant factor (mean of 4.04) amongst all 10 reasons for Australia to be selected as a study destination. Following this, “safety and low racial discrimination” ranked as the third most important motivation, with a mean value of 3.86. In alignment with survey results, those two factors were also reflected in a large number of interviewee responses (approximately 30%). According to the interviews, those two environmentally related factors were put into more accurate categories, that is, natural environment and socio-cultural environment.

Another reason offered on the questionnaire was that Australia was “a good place to travel”, and was listed up at No.8 among all 10 factors why to pick Australia as overseas study destination. This factor however did not catch the attention of any of the interviewees. Data from the present research probably mean that this factor was somewhat relevant to this research but not a driving force. Being associated with the various environments of Australia, this factor is mentioned here, but no further interpretation can be given due to insufficient importance.

8.7.1 Natural Environment

The stunning natural environment of Australia is well known in China, and so it contributes to Chinese international students choosing it as a study destination. In fact, it was considered as significantly attractive that Australia primarily has a warm climate and clean air. Some interviewees actively preferred a country with a warm climate to study in, “I took into account Canada and Australia. The reason why I finally chose Australia was because Canada is too cold” (IV4). This is in line with the argument in the prior work of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) that South-East Asian international students viewed Australia as a preferred destination because of its warmer weather compared with New Zealand, the U.K. or Canada. While China is not a part of South-East Asia, this previous research implies that countries with warm weather or climate can be a preference for Asian international students who are living in a warm weather or climate. Students from South China come from a warm climate and are thus be more likely to choose Australia. This may well explain why more than half of the survey respondents in this research were actually from South China.

Apart from the warm climate, clean air is something Chinese international students were looking for in an overseas study destination. In the last few years, China has suffered from severe air pollution. This has continued for some time now, so Chinese people need to address

this growing issue. Some Chinese are looking for a solution beyond the border, “my relatives have been in Australia for a long time, and they all reckon the Australian environment is very good, like fresh air” (IV6). In this way, Australia’s fresh air obviously meets Chinese international students’ expectations. In early studies, air condition was not pointed out as a factor for guiding international students to their overseas study destination, but recently Liu’s work (2015), has started to reveal air condition as a growing domestic factor that is starting to influence choice of study location. This finding here adds fresh evidence to that, revealing that Chinese international students have increasing concerns about air condition when picking their foreign study destination.

8.7.2 Socio-Cultural Environment

The socio-cultural environment of a study destination is also a significant determinant for Chinese, and issues like personal safety and low racial discrimination are taken into consideration. Chinese international students are more likely to choose a host country with high safety and low racial discrimination. Being a multicultural country, Australia demonstrates the ability to accommodate people from different countries. Three interviewees mentioned this factor. It appeared to actually deter all of them from going to study in the U.S.A., since the U.S.A. showed low safety and high racial discrimination. Thus, the image of Australia in the mind of some Chinese international students was as a more welcoming and diverse society than that of the U.S.A.

I am scared of going to the U.S.A., because in the U.S.A., it is legal to have a gun. (Because of that,) my parents would be afraid that my tragic death would happen there. I am afraid of that too. Compared with the U.S.A., Australia is safer. Additionally, I heard that the U.S.A. seriously discriminates against Chinese people, whereas Australians are quite friendly. Thus, Australia would be better. (IV9)

For Chinese international students who choose to study overseas at a very young age, their safety is the first priority and always the most important factor when choosing a host country. Since most of the Chinese children were from the rich second generation (see section 7.6), their family could send them overseas without family company to study from middle school to bachelor’s degree, or even for a higher degree, and so a longer duration overseas residence incurs a higher safety risk than those who only sought one qualification abroad. Additionally, as the only child at home, their parents are very concerned about their safety. Interviewees revealed that Australia was an ideal study destination for those students. Also, their previous Australian study journeys have confirmed that Australia is a safe place, so they have stayed on in Australia for further education.

The result of this research is in line with many existing studies (Bamber, 2014; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007). In some important Australia-wide surveys on international student study destinations, such as the International Student Barometer (ISB) 2014 (i-graduate, 2014) and the 2016 ISS (DET, 2017c), personal

safety and security have been identified as the top factor for students choosing Australia. This study offers two major distinctions with previous research. The first is that it has found that both high safety and low racial discrimination should be met at the same time in selecting an overseas destination country. The other distinctive part is the special importance of this factor for Chinese students who sought to study in Australia at a young age, and decided to continue life in Australia in pursuit of a higher education.

8.8 Conclusion

This chapter has developed detailed insights into the factors at work among Chinese international students when selecting Australia as their overseas higher education destination country, which is the third aspect of the literature-derived framework for making choices based on a logical sequence. Those factors include distinctive issues that Chinese international students find attractive about Australia as destination for study, and Australia's advantages over other host countries, especially other English-speaking countries, from the perspective of Chinese international students. In choosing Australia, Chinese international students are influenced by the following six major motivating factors, and 12 relevant sub-factors. This reveals that there is no single selection criterion for choosing a study destination country that fits all Chinese international students. Rather, their choice is made up from a number of diverse factors.

- An English-speaking country
- Accessibility of country
 - A future immigration opportunity
 - A quick and easy student visa application process
- Accessibility of Australian higher education
 - Joint education programs
 - Competitive costs
 - Low university entry requirements
- Knowledge of Australian higher education
 - A good reputation for higher education in the world
 - Easy to know about Australia or Australian higher education in China
- Social links
 - Influence from parents, relatives, education agents or friends
 - Family or friends in Australia
 - Past Australian experiences
- Environmental considerations
 - Natural environment
 - Socio-cultural environment

Through identification and interpretation of these key decision drivers, the first research question (what are the factors influencing the choices of Chinese international students in their decision to enrol in a regional Australian university?) falling under the primary research

objective (to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university) has been partly addressed.

Chapter 9 Results and Discussion for Theme– Tasmania

9.1 Introduction

Now that the first three choices in the literature-derived framework for making choices of this research (for higher education, overseas, and country) have been examined, this chapter will explore the fourth logical choice, that is, why Chinese international students have chosen to pursue higher education in Tasmania, a regional Australian area (see Figure 9.1).

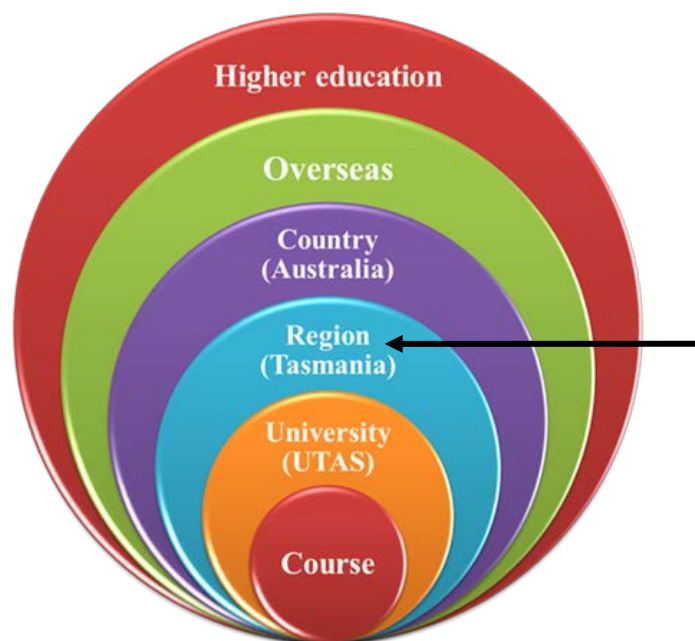


Figure 9.1. The choice of region (Tasmania) within the literature-derived framework for making choices.

Policies and actions that were mentioned in Chapter 1 are instrumental in attracting Chinese international students to Tasmania. However, the motivations behind the students' decisions were unknown. This study has been undertaken to explore these motivations through the use of both survey and interview. In the survey, one question asked "the reasons why you came to Tasmania for study" with eight factors that could be chosen from, and an open-ended section attached to collect answers from them. Finally, there were 456 Chinese international students responding to this question.

Table 9.1 presents the descriptive statistics summary of the survey data for the Tasmania choice. Factors are listed based on the sequence, from the smallest mean value to the largest.

Table 9.1

Descriptive Statistics Summary of the Survey Data for the Choice–Tasmania¹

Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
Good study environment	4.04	1.032	36.6%	43.2%	13.2%	1.3%	5.7%
Natural environment	3.85	1.13	30.5%	42.1%	17.3%	1.8%	8.3%
Low living expenses	3.82	1.106	28.5%	41.9%	20.0%	2.0%	7.7%
Safety	3.74	1.208	28.1%	41.9%	17.3%	1.5%	11.2%
Relaxing lifestyle	3.71	1.178	25.2%	44.1%	18.4%	1.5%	10.7%
No large Chinese community	3.55	1.301	27.9%	30.9%	23.2%	4.8%	13.2%
Easier to immigrate to compared with other Australian states	3.54	1.278	25.4%	33.6%	23.7%	4.2%	13.2%
A good place to travel	3.46	1.238	20.8%	34.4%	27.4%	4.4%	12.9%

Apart from the survey, 23 Chinese participants from UTAS took part in individual interviews for identifying motivating factors for them to receive higher education in a regional Australian state, Tasmania.

The questionnaire responses were put together and grouped along with other factors identified from the interviews and open-ended questionnaire section. The elaboration of the factors, a comparison between them, and the existing research findings will now be presented in the following sections.

9.2 A Conducive Study Environment

The most predominant reason that Chinese international students stated for choosing Tasmania as a study destination was that it had an environment conducive to study. This was the same for both survey and interview. In the survey, having a “good study environment” was selected by the largest number of students with a mean of 4.04. What is more, it was actually the highest mean value found among all other factors, even for choosing Tasmania (this chapter), UTAS (Chapter 10) or their particular course of study (Chapter 11). Additionally, a large proportion (roughly 70%) of participants in the interviews highlighted this as a factor which helped motivate them to come to Tasmania, and more importantly, it was the dominant driver and decisive reason that they came to Tasmania.

In the interviews, approximately half of all participants mentioned that the lack of a large Chinese community in Tasmania was vital for them when choosing this study locale, since they believed that that is what makes it such a good environment to study in. Thus, the questionnaire item, “no large Chinese community” with a mean of 3.55 (ranked No. 6) has been included

¹SD = Standard Deviation; VI = Very Important; I = Important; UI = Unimportant; VUI = Very Unimportant; NC = Never Considered.

here under the factor of a conducive study environment, since students overtly linked those two together. However, no large Chinese population in Tasmania also impacted on other factors in student decisions, so it will be discussed in other sections in this chapter as well.

Approximately 65% of interviewees and a few respondents of the open-ended survey section identified other crucial reasons that were not in the questionnaire, but which explained why they thought Tasmania a great place for study. These included the ability to improve their English language skills faster, the lack of distractions, a quiet environment, a small population, and ease with which to be involved in Australian culture and society. Consequently, these factors will be added to this section.

This factor will now be divided into two parts that surfaced in the interviews, as a unique environment for English language learning, and as a good environment for general study.

9.2.1 A Unique Environment for English Language Learning

One of the key reasons for Chinese international students to choose Tasmania, a regional state, instead of metropolises is that it was perceived as a unique environment for their English language learning. Seven interviewees indicated this factor, and almost all of them stated that this was the main factor that they did not choose a big city such as Sydney or Melbourne. This is rooted in the small size of Chinese population in Tasmania compared to larger metropolises that have large Chinese communities. They believed that a place with a lower density of Chinese would have a purer English language learning environment and would provide them with more opportunities to practice English. This would then result in their English language skills improving faster. Tasmania was that kind of place, and met their language expectations.

I chose Tasmania, rather than Sydney or Melbourne. To be honest, it was because too many Chinese are in Sydney and Melbourne. I put a lot of effort into studying English and passing the IELTS test, so I really did not want to see a situation where I would be surrounded by Chinese and never use English when studying in Australia, which would be a shame for me. If so, why did I choose to come to Australia instead of studying in China? Additionally, studying in China is cheaper. Before I came to Tasmania, I did some research. I found that Tasmania only had 2,000 Chinese people. I felt that if I came to Tasmania with such a small Chinese population, I would practice English better and reach the goal of overseas study (improving my English language skills). (IV9)

Some interviewees clarified that the Chinese population of an area would contribute to their overseas experience, but that they preferred it to be a smaller one. The size of the Chinese population in Tasmania was satisfactory for them, since it could be both a conducive English language learning environment as well as a place that offered a convenient lifestyle for them with a small community from the same country.

I would not envy friends who are studying in Sydney or Melbourne. Before

coming to Tasmania, I knew the Chinese population in Tasmania was comparatively smaller (than Australia's bigger cities). This would be a very good thing.... But no Chinese community would not be a good thing as well.... In daily life, help from Chinese friends and living with Chinese people would still enable me to adapt to the overseas environment better and faster. Thus, I could say I need a Chinese community but not a large one. (IV12)

There is a scarcity of research on the factors behind international students choosing higher education in Tasmania. In fact, only one study has been discovered that is related to this finding. Research on the transnational migration strategies of Chinese and Indian international students in Australia (Tan, 2012) indicated that Chinese international students' decisions to study in the small city of Adelaide was linked to a smaller Chinese community being there, and that that created a good opportunity for them to learn English there. This research agrees with Tan's study (2012) within the context of Tasmania.

9.2.2 A Good Environment for General Study

Tasmania's environment is also conducive to study. This factor was mentioned by 65% of interviewees and a few respondents from open-ended questionnaire section, and is due to the high importance that Chinese people attach to study from a CHC perspective (see section 6.3).

That is, as a regional area Tasmania provides students with a good environment for studying. On one level, as an island with a fairly small population (compared with most areas in China) it is isolated, and so the environment has fewer distractions and interference to study. Almost all interviewees came from, or had studied in large urban areas in China. Their previous experiences made them see big cities as bad places for study. One interviewee stated that "big cities have their own distractions. I did my bachelor's program in Beijing. Sometimes I felt it was too noisy and annoying. Thus, I just would like to go to a quiet place for study, and so I chose Tasmania" (IV14). That's also a reason mentioned by other interviewees as well.

The population in Tasmania is comparatively small. A quiet place is the place for studying, for thinking. This was the most important reason (for me to choose Tasmania). I certainly would not go to Sydney or Melbourne for study. I like the big city, but I did not want to study there. I feel like the big city is a restless (浮躁的, fú zào de) where people are not able to come to stillness due to being absorbed in doing so many things. I felt that no matter what I would be studying, I should set my mind at ease. Plus, I had been to Melbourne several times. My personal opinion was that Melbourne is not a place for study. (IV13)

On another level, in terms of sociocultural adaptation, Chinese international students felt that in such a small community as Tasmania, it would be comparatively easier for them to become involved in Australian culture and society than in bigger metropolises. This is another factor that influenced them. Interviewees made this assertion by again mentioning the advantage of

there being no large Chinese community in Tasmania. They would have plenty of opportunities to become familiar with Western culture and interact with Australians and people from different countries in Tasmania because of this. In short, Chinese international students did not want to be in a place in Australia which was just like China.

Conversely, they feared that they may also become even reluctant to expose themselves to Australian culture if they chose to study in a large city, and that they could end up limiting themselves to contact with other Chinese people. In other words, a true Australian experience was the main expectation for their overseas study experience, as one interviewee said, “since Australia is (a representative of) the West, I hoped that I would be able to become more familiar with some parts of Western culture after studying there, rather than just limiting myself to a circle of Chinese people” (IV13).

Very few studies (Abubakar, Shanka, & Muuka, 2010; Jenkins, 2007; Shanka et al., 2006; Tan, 2012) have looked at the motivations of international students when selecting specific host countries as their study location. Jenkins’ Ph.D. research (2007) focused on why international students chose to pursue a degree at Oklahoma State University. It is the only study to date which has revealed that a small city is actually preferable for international students. While the findings in this research are in alignment with those of Jenkins, this factor is identified with Australia, not the U.S.A., and is limited to students coming from China.

9.3 Good Living Conditions

Tasmania’s good living conditions also attract Chinese international students. It embodies a range of regional advantages that include low expenses, high safety, friendly locals and a relaxed lifestyle. Some of these advantages were highly rated by survey respondents, and others were identified by a number of interviewees and in the open-ended survey section. Based on this, good living conditions were of considerable significance to the final decision of the students due to low expenses and because of the presence of a welcoming community.

9.3.1 Low Expenses

Low expenses are a crucial consideration for the Chinese international students to choose the regional state, Tasmania, as their study location in Australia. “Low living expenses” as a factor scored 3.82 in the questionnaire, and was the third amongst the eight influencing factors for the choice of Tasmania.

Almost one third of the interviewees stated that this reason directly resulted in their decision, among all of the options, to come to Tasmania. As discussed in section 8.4.2, most Chinese students are self-funded, and so are very concerned about affordable study options. Most of the interviewees mentioned that they compared costs between Australian metropolises and Tasmania, and found the regional area to be more economically viable for them. According to data from the Student Cities Australia (2017), Hobart ranks No.1 as the cheapest Australian

major university city to live in. Other students, based more on common sense than serious research, simply believed that “Tasmania, geographically, is comparatively regional. Plus, it has a small population. Thus, such a place should not have a high consumption level” (IV4). Chinese international students who were not particularly from the rich second generation (see section 7.6) or from very well-off families also showed a tendency to choose Tasmania in this study, due to concerns of affordability.

Interviewees included university tuition fee expenses in their responses. Most did not distinguish tuition costs from general living expenses, because UTAS is the only university in the state, and choosing it is equal to choosing Tasmania for them. In the next chapter, the low tuition fee of UTAS will be discussed more comprehensively. Some interviewees had received offers from other universities in metropolises and other regions of Australia, but accepted the offer from Tasmania because they took the living costs and the tuition costs into account.

Nevertheless, as savvy consumers, a few interviewees revealed that Tasmania was a highly cost-effective choice with the evidence of affordable expenses and high-quality education. One interviewee remarked, “I compared the tuition fees. The tuitions in universities in Sydney and Melbourne were almost three times that in Tasmania, but I felt the education quality in those big cities must be less than three times compared with Tasmania” (IV14).

Data from the 2016 ISS revealed that when choosing a town or city to study in, the most important reason rated by international students was the cost of living (Hobsons EMEA, 2016). Pimpa (2002) and Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006) respectively reported that living costs had a big impact on Asian students’ choice of city. Looking specifically at Tasmania however was not their focus. The findings here agree with the above studies, but focus only on the context of Tasmania.

9.3.2 A Welcoming Community

Tasmania is seen as having a welcoming community, and this helps many Chinese international students make the decision to study here. High safety, friendly people, and a relaxed lifestyle were three key elements manifested in interviews and showed that Chinese international students often felt very welcomed in Tasmania.

Safety (with a mean of 3.74) was seen by survey respondents as a significant factor as well, with a mean ranked at No.4 amongst all eight items for coming to Tasmania for study. Nevertheless, in interviews, only one participant mentioned this factor, and “peaceful” was the term used to express the safe feeling Tasmania offer that individual. The high ranking of this factor however is not misleading, since Chinese students were well aware of the high safety of Australia as a study destination (see section 8.7.2). Tasmania has a good reputation in China, and there is little news about it having safety concerns. Chinese international students therefore felt no need to compare safety rankings with that of other Australian locations. This finding is in line with the prior work of Hobsons EMEA (2016) that revealed low crime rates as the third most important factor for international students when

choosing a town or city to study in. Deloitte Access Economics commissioned by DET (2015) found that international students in Australia chose regional education providers over metropolitan providers due to a perception that it was safer than metropolitan areas. Nevertheless, Chinese international students in this research did not overtly state that they had compared safety rankings for study locations in Australia.

Friendly people were another element that contributed to Tasmania being seen as a welcoming community, and was mentioned by two interviewees. Both of them were attracted by affable locals in Tasmania after searching online or talking to people from Tasmania. Friendly people like this could represent a sense of home away from home in the minds of the students. That is, an emotional and psychological appeal to this location, and it helps create a positive image of Tasmania in their minds. There is a dearth of literature on the influence of friendly interactions on choice of study location. The most relevant existing information (Department of State Growth, 2016; Study Tasmania, 2017) is the promotion of Tasmania or UTAS through official means.

Chinese international students are also attracted by Tasmania's relaxed lifestyle, which is very distinct from that of China. The mean value (1.96) and mean ranking of No.5 among the eight reasons, reveals that a relaxed lifestyle is of significance to them. As in the survey results, this was also highlighted in interviews. Almost all interviewees had lived or studied in big cities in China before arriving in Australia. They admitted that the hustle and bustle of metropolises put them under incredible amounts of pressure and they were somewhat sick of the big city. They were looking for a place away from all of that which was more relaxing.

This is also part of the attraction of Tasmania over bigger Australian metropolises. One interviewee remarked, "I never considered undertaking my master's degree in Sydney or Melbourne, because I do not like big cities. Big cities make me feel very depressed, and overcrowded. I like somewhere quiet" (IV2). As mentioned in section 6.9.4, another group who took leave to study after a long period of hard work, felt that studying would actually be relaxing. A study location with a slow tempo of life therefore was their wish.

Tasmania as a region has a small population and so offers a relaxed lifestyle that is unique in the modern world. Chinese international students have heard intriguing information about Tasmania, like "work pressure in Tasmania is not as high as in China" (IV15), and "living conditions in Tasmania are good" (IV15), which they have been told by acquaintances living in Tasmania.

There is little discussion about a relaxed lifestyle contributing to international student choice of study location. This research has found this factor playing a vital role in attracting Chinese international students to study in Tasmania.

9.4 Natural Environment

The scenic natural environment of Tasmania also draws Chinese international students here. Survey respondents scored this factor with the second highest mean value of 3.85 among all factors, which meant that the natural environment played a greatly important role in their choice.

The significance of this factor was shown in the survey and in interviews. More than half of the interviewees stated that Tasmania's stunning natural scenery had attracted them. When asked what the image of Tasmania was in their mind before coming to Tasmania, most of them mentioned Tasmania's outstanding natural beauty. They commented, "at that time, I heard Tasmania is the most beautiful place in Australia. Its ecological environment is very good. The whole island is world heritage." (IV11); or "before I came to Tasmania, the image of Tasmania was that of a super beautiful fairyland on earth." (IV9).

For a few interviewees, this was the deciding factor for them to come to choose it. Some decided to study in Tasmania before applying to other universities. One student's parents even made the decision for him to study in Tasmania.

They felt that Tasmania was so beautiful. They thought if I could study in Tasmania for a few years, it would be a process of not only studying but also purifying my mind. The beautiful view would give me some inspiration every day. (IV8)

It is also one of the main reasons for others to accept an offer by UTAS, rather than to accept offers from other Australian universities. Tasmania's natural beauty attracted them as they searched for the information about Tasmania.

Some Chinese international students were attracted by travel opportunities while in Tasmania. The survey item, "a good place to travel" rated the last of all eight factors. However, a large amount of questionnaire respondents rated this factor as important (mean score of 3.46). Three interviewees elaborated on that potential travel opportunities in Tasmania had motivated them to pick it as their study location, believing that this would help make it an enjoyable study experience for them.

International student motivations for picking a regional area as their study location are understudied. The natural environment is an element promoting study in a regional area (Studies in Australia, 2017), as well as in Tasmania (e.g. Study Tasmania, 2017), but it has not been identified in any academic research. This research has discovered this as a neglected factor for Chinese international students choosing to study in regional Australia.

9.5 Regional Immigration Advantages

A very compelling factor for choosing regional Australia is the regional immigration advantages of Tasmania. Permanent immigration is an objective for many Chinese international students. This has been seen in the survey, where the factor of it being "easier to

immigrate to compared with other Australian states” accounted for a mean of 3.54. This was ranked at the seventh place of all eight factors for the choice of Tasmania, however, 59% of survey respondents rated it as “very important” or “important” in leading them to their decision. Another interpretation for the particular importance of this reason but with a mean which is a bit low is the fact that only survey respondents who had a strong propensity to immigrate to Australia would probably consider this factor significant for them, and therefore, it is reasonable to see the mean value of “easier to immigrate to compared with other Australian states” for the choice of Tasmania (3.54) smaller than the mean score of factor of “future immigration opportunity” mentioned in the last chapter (3.78).

Results from interviews not only show consistency with the survey data but also present even more evidence that some students intend to immigrate to Australia post study. They reported doing a great deal of research on Australia’s national and state immigration policies and regulations as part of their decision making for study location.

The students tend to discover that regional Australia offers them unique and special advantages in two main ways. On one hand, the study experience in regional Australia can grant them five extra points in the Australian DIBP point test for skilled migration visa applications, including both the Skilled Independent visa and the Skilled Nominated visa, which most international students tend to apply for. These skilled migration visas require 60-point threshold. Interviewees elaborated on the difficulties of collecting 60 points, and the significance of the extra points from their study experience in regional Australia. One interviewee answered why she finally chose Tasmania rather than Sydney or Melbourne, “because I am too young. If I did not come to a regional Australian university for extra points, I would not be able to get enough points for immigration” (IV6).¹ This region-related policy particularly entices Chinese international students who hope to immigrate, but are worried about their visa point score.

On the other hand, Tasmania provides more immigration approaches and opportunities for international higher education students, and especially so to Chinese international students. The Australian Government allows state governments to nominate applicants to meet their specific labour market needs. If Chinese international students are not interested in occupations related to the national skilled occupation list, but still would like to immigrate to Australia through skilled migration visas, Tasmania would be the wisest choice. The Tasmanian Skilled Occupation List is much bigger than the national one. However, to be considered for a Tasmanian skilled nominated visa, one of the main prerequisites is that applicants should be graduated from a tertiary institution in Tasmania. Interviewees indicated that this kind of state-based regionalised immigration policies weighed heavily on their decision to study in Tasmania. Apart from the advantages of occupations more eligible for them, interviewees also mentioned

¹ Applicants who are in different age stages are scored differently according to points score system of skilled migration visa applications. More specifically, applicants whose age in the range of 18-24 years will obtain 25 points. Those between 25-32 years will get 30 points. People who are in any age between 33-39 years will gain 25 points. 15 points will be issued to applicants in 40-44 years (DIBP, 2017b, 2017c).

other key advantages of Tasmania state nomination visas, such as five extra points for the Skilled Nominated visa. Also, along with the growth of the partnership between Tasmania and China recently, an increasing number of Chinese international students have been nominated for Tasmania state-sponsored immigration (Department of State Growth, 2015). This has stimulated more Chinese international students coming to Tasmania to pursue higher education for the purpose of immigration.

Some studies, such as that of Birrell et al. (as cited in Tan, 2012) have discovered that international students have adopted regional international education as a vehicle towards permanent immigration. Tan's work (2012) asserted that Chinese and Indian international students chose Adelaide as their study destination with the key objective of permanent residency. My finding is in line with these two studies, but the focus here was more specifically focused in on Chinese international and Tasmania as their destination of choice.

9.6 Information Sources

Students access a number of information sources when choosing to come to Tasmania for study, and these sources can have a significant influence on their final decision. There are four main sources of information: family or acquaintances who lived or travelled in Tasmania, online searches, education agencies, and peers coming to study in Tasmania, in order from the most used sources to the least.

While this was not an item in the questionnaire for respondents to rate, its significance was shown in 14 interviewees and four respondents of the open-ended survey section. In the interviews students were also asked the question, "before you came to Tasmania, what was the image of Tasmania in your mind?" and, when answering, participants identified and described which sources of information they had accessed. The reflection from most of them was that such information reinforced their idea to study in Tasmania, but perhaps contrary to expectations, it was not a decisive factor.

In comparison with the first three items in the literature-derived framework for making choices (see Figure 3.2), the choice to study in Tasmania is pertaining more to personal choice, rather than parents' decision. In other words, parents of Chinese international students pay more attention to life-changing choices than their individual and detailed sub-choices, like the study location in a certain country.

Approximately one third of interviewees in this study had family or friends who lived in Tasmania or had visited here, and three respondents of the open-ended survey did as well. What these family or friends passed on about Tasmania as a place to live and study was trusted as first-hand experience by the prospective Chinese international students. The students mentioned mainly positive aspects of Tasmania that were relayed to them by these people. This word-of-mouth referral had a profound effect on them deciding to come to Tasmania, and the strongest source was family living in Tasmania. Chinese international students tended to select

to study in the country and specific location where their family were located. As discussed in section 8.6.2, it would be an opportunity for them to spend time with them again, this time in Tasmania.

For Chinese international students who did not have a direct link with Tasmania, online searches played a vital role in their selection of study location. In the interviews, more than 30% of the participants used online searches to obtain information about studying and living in Tasmania. Sources noted by the interviewees encompassed online forums, search engines, the UTAS website and Google maps, with the first two being the main sources. Three interviewees particularly mentioned Taschinese, which is an online forum of Tasmania's Chinese community in Chinese. They stated that they paid close attention to people's comments on that forum, and on experiences shared there, and that it had a fairly significant impact on the decision of these students. Besides online forums, search engines, like Google or Baidu,¹ provided general information on Tasmania. The most convenient and effective approach for Chinese international students to get information about Tasmania was to use such search engines.

Education agencies are another source of information, and it was an underestimated source which was at work in the students' decision making. Two interviewees relayed that education agencies not only assisted them to apply for studying in Tasmania, but also provided useful information about it, which helped them know much more about the destination they were choosing. According to the *International education—International education position paper* released by the Tasmanian Government Department of State Growth in 2016, Tasmanian education providers, like UTAS, had a close partnership with education agencies all over the world, in the form of delivering training for their networks of agencies, so that these agencies could promote certain institutions or regions.

Peers coming to study in Tasmania together are another crucial information source for some Chinese international students, and effectively pull them to Tasmania to pursue higher education. These peers were of the utmost importance in influencing some of the students, not only regarding their choice to pursue higher education, but also the choice to do so overseas, as well as to do so in Australia (see section 6.8.2, section 7.10.1, section 8.6.1). They also are the main reason for the choice of Tasmania among the other states in Australia. Such peers had the latest information about Tasmania, and passed it on to their friends. In this way, the students held a view related to the Chinese traditional value that to swim with the tide always brings you to the right direction.

There has previously been little discussion about the influence of information sources on the choice of study location by international students and none concerning students who choose Tasmania. One study has been conducted about a regional American university, one for Perth Australia, and one regarding Thai students coming to Australia, as described below.

¹ Baidu is the most popular search engine in China.

Jenkins' research (2007) showed that internet research and the influence of advisors were primary factors contributing to student choice for international students at Oklahoma State University, a small city university in the United States. Although interviewees in Jenkins' study included Chinese international students, he did not take into account the difference among the choice of country, the choice of study location, the choice of university and the course choice, so it was difficult to tell which choice the identified factors belonged to.

Shanka et al. (2006) also found that it was friends who had studied or were currently studying in Perth, Western Australia who were a factor that influenced international student choices for an Australian higher education institution in Perth. That result is seen in this study as well.

Finally, Pimpa's doctoral study (2002) indicated that family members living overseas, or student recruitment agencies also functioned as sources of information that Thai international students depended on when selecting which city in Australia to come to, and the particular choice of city was more related to personal factors.

The findings of this study are in line with three studies mentioned above, but particularly focus on Chinese international students picking Tasmania out of other possible locations in Australia.

9.7 Joint Education Programs

Joint education programs are a key official approach and a primary factor that have contributed to some Chinese international students coming to Tasmania. The students have been faithful to the education pathways package, such those of the joint education programs. All 10 Chinese international students from joint education programs between Australia and China, or Australia and Singapore, and seven respondents in the open-ended survey section, pointed out that if they wanted to gain double degrees or upgrade their qualification in these programs, they had no other choice but to come to Tasmania. In this way Tasmania had become an obligatory choice for them based on the link with UTAS and their particular course.

The reason I came to Tasmania was because of UTAS. I would go wherever UTAS was.... In terms of study location, I would be happy anywhere (随遇而安, suí yù ér ān).... Now that lots of international students go there, that place must be okay.... It must be a place where people can live. As long as it is a liveable place, I felt it was ok. (IV12)

Before interviewees applied for joint education programs, the ranking or the reputation of the Australian host university of the program was taken into account rather than the university location. They stated that the university location was less important, as long as it was in Australia.

Most interviewees in joint education programs admitted to never considering Melbourne or Sydney, since their programs were for Tasmania, and therefore, Tasmania was their only choice.

This was ultimately due to their concern of time, costs or ease of access to overseas higher education.

Interestingly, among those who were in joint education programs, their image of Tasmania developed differently from those who were not in arranged programs. Half of them had a clear perception of the geographical location of Tasmania in the world and Australia, and knew something about it. Two of them pointed out that they had gained their knowledge from classes conducted by UTAS lecturers when they were in these programs in Chinese universities. The other half of them however admitted that they had no clear sense of Tasmania before arriving. Some of them did not even know that Tasmania was a regional area, and others had no idea of where it was. They did not seek any information about their study location because their joint education program had already secured a place for them to study in, and that was all they felt the need to know.

Only Jenkins' doctoral research (2007) has discussed the effect that the relationship between Oklahoma State University and foreign schools has had upon international students. The findings here are consistent with his results. A key limitation of his work is that he did not separate the different levels of choices made by international students, so whether joint education programs were a motivation for student decisions to go to regional America or not cannot be explicitly ascertained from it. The research here shows however a clear association between joint education programs and a choice for study in a regional part of Australia, Tasmania.

9.8 Conclusion

Factors have been identified and interpreted in this chapter, and are closely associated with the fourth choice in the literature-derived framework for making choices, that is, why Chinese international students have selected to pursue higher education in the Australian regional area of Tasmania. Moreover, this chapter has examined the unique and special regional appeal of Tasmania for Chinese international students, which Australian metropolises do not have for them.

A review of current literature revealed that there is a scarcity of investigations on the impact of international student intentions to study in a regional area. In this way, this study is probably the first in this under-researched field to focus on the motivations of Chinese international students for choosing a regional Australian area as their overseas higher education location. This chapter has also addressed the first research question (what are the factors influencing the choices of Chinese international students in their decision to enrol in a regional Australian university?), for the primary objective of this research (to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university).

On the whole, the following six primary factors, and four related sub-factors lead Chinese international students to pursue higher education in Tasmania.

- A conducive study environment
 - A unique environment for English language learning
 - A good environment for general study
- Good living conditions
 - Low expenses
 - A welcoming community
- Natural environment
- Regional immigration advantages
- Information sources
- Joint education programs

The intriguing thing discovered in the interviews of this research was that although all participants had clear reasons for undertaking higher education, for choosing to study overseas, and even for coming to Australia, some participants admitted that they had very little knowledge of Tasmania, and had not even attempted to find out about it when deciding to choose it as a study location. When being asked “why would you come to Tasmania, a regional state, instead of going to one of the metropolises, like Melbourne or Sydney?”, instead of providing motivating factors related to Tasmania, some of them gave reasons influencing their choice of UTAS or the course choice. Their choice of study location was limited by their choice of university or of a particular course. Some of them were restricted due to enrolled joint education programs, whereas others did not attach significance to the choice of study location at all, and decided higher important choices first, like university or course. Thus, they were reluctant to collect information of about their study location before arriving, simply accepting the place in which their chosen university was located or their course was. This will be further discussed in Chapter 13.

Chapter 10 Results and Discussion for Theme– UTAS

10.1 Introduction

The last four chapters have examined the first four logical choices in the literature-derived framework for making choices of this study. This chapter will probe into the fifth logical choice, why Chinese international students have selected to study at UTAS, a regional Australian university (see Figure 10.1).

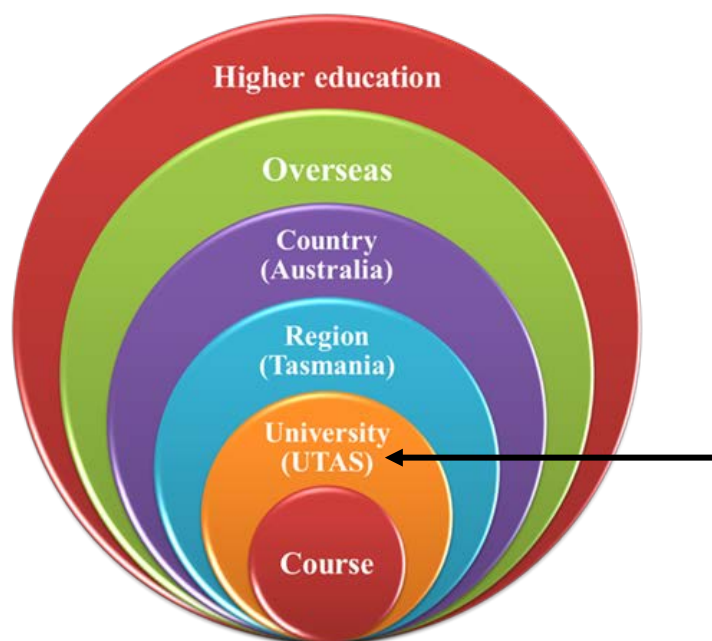


Figure 10.1. The choice of university (UTAS) within the literature-derived framework for making choices.

In the questionnaire, a question was posed about “the reasons why you selected to study at UTAS” with seven reasons offered, and an open-ended section given which was used to collect responses on this theme. The final number of responses to this question in survey was 456. The descriptive statistics summary of the survey data for this choice of UTAS is shown in Table 10.1. Factors are listed based on the sequence from the smallest mean value to the largest. In the table, the standard deviation for each factor and distribution of five-point Likert scales are used for presenting the spread of responses for each factor.

Table 10.1

Descriptive Statistics Summary of the Survey Data for the Choice–UTAS¹

Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
Low tuition costs	3.94	1.038	31.6%	44.3%	16.2%	2.2%	5.7%
Availability of scholarships	3.7	1.205	27.4%	38.8%	20.4%	2.9%	10.5%
Easier/faster to get an offer of enrolment compared to other Australian universities	3.67	1.128	23.2%	40.6%	24.6%	2.9%	8.8%
University reputation/ranking	3.46	1.099	12.3%	46.7%	27.0%	3.3%	10.7%
The qualification is recognised in China	3.35	1.263	17.1%	36.2%	26.3%	5.0%	15.4%
Accepting transfer credits	3.19	1.328	15.8%	31.6%	28.9%	3.3%	20.4%
Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	3.16	1.345	15.1%	33.3%	25.4%	5.0%	21.1%

In addition, 23 individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken to identify motivations that influenced the choice of the students for UTAS.

Reasons listed in the questionnaire and new factors identified in the interviews, as well as the open-ended questionnaire section were put together and grouped. The following sections will elaborate on these factors, and compare them with previous research findings.

10.2 Higher Quality-Cost Ratio

The higher quality-cost ratio of UTAS compared with other Australian universities' is a key factor motivating Chinese international students to study at there. This particular phrase, "higher quality-cost ratio" was given by a few interview participants in this study. That is, Chinese international students appeared to be savvy consumers. After they juxtaposed both quality and expenses across Australian universities, the particular attributes of UTAS, this particular regional Australian university satisfied them due to its more competitive tuition fees and the availability of scholarships, which rendered it affordable for them. UTAS's good reputation also ensured them that they would be offered a quality higher education there. Other Australian university tuition prices were much higher for the similar level of education quality, and they did not offer the range of scholarship opportunities that UTAS does. Thus, the students believed that they would benefit more by choosing UTAS over other Australian universities.

10.2.1 More Competitive Tuition Fees

Competitive tuition fees are a financial factor that has the most influence on Chinese international students' decisions to attend UTAS, a regional Australian university. This factor

¹SD = Standard Deviation; VI = Very Important; I = Important; UI = Unimportant; VUI = Very Unimportant; NC = Never Considered.

was rated the most important (with a mean of 3.94) among all seven reasons for study at UTAS. Not surprisingly, the significance of this motivation was also highlighted in the interviews.

A large number of Chinese international students who have come to study in Australia need to pay costly international student tuition fees, which are usually a few times more than those for universities in China (see section 8.4.2). Tuition costs are always a sizeable proportion of total expenditure for overseas study. Thus, it is no wonder that the tuition costs are of great concern for them.

In the process of exploring the affordability of study in Australia, the students found that the costs of UTAS were relatively low for them based on three separate standards. The first was a comparison of Australian university tuition fees on the basis of university rankings. The students who looked at these believed that five-star universities or universities in the Group of Eight (Go8) were the most prestigious amongst all universities, and university ranking took priority over tuition fees. However, five-star universities or those in the Go8 had the most expensive tuition fees among all Australian universities, so financial compromise was necessary and they eventually came to accept UTAS, which was thought of as a four-star university by them, and not part of the Go8. The second standard was a comparison between the tuition of regional Australian universities and metropolitan ones. The tuition of those in big cities was much higher than those of regional Australia, as discussed in the last chapter (see section 9.3.1). For example, two participants in the interviews cited that “the tuition in universities in Sydney and Melbourne were almost three times higher than UTAS” (IV14, IV16). The third standard was a comparison of tuition costs across all regional Australian universities, and this group found that UTAS still had a tuition advantage in competition with other regional Australian universities.

A small number of studies have focused on the motivations of international students in picking a regional university. Doctoral studies from Bohman (2009) and Jenkins (2007) both indicated that cheap tuition is a key decision-making factor for international students when choosing regional American higher education programs. The findings of my research are from a different context, Chinese international students and Australian higher education. In this context, ISB of RUN (i-graduate, 2014) identified that the cost of study was the fifth factor impacting on international student study decisions, and that there were 2% more international student respondents in universities in RUN who had chosen this factor than those in the Australia-wide range. UTAS is not a member of RUN even though it is a regional university. In addition, ISB is not a Chinese international student-focused survey. This research here has provided evidence from international students, particularly Chinese international students, about why they choose another regional Australian university, UTAS.

10.2.2 Availability of Scholarships

The availability of scholarships is also a financial factor behind Chinese international students selecting UTAS. This was ranked the second most important reason (mean of 3.7) by survey respondents. Also, more than one third of participants (N=9) mentioned this point in interviews.

The UTAS scholarship strategy covers all degree levels for international students. UTAS scholarships are quite generous for international students undertaking non-research courses. In the context of Australian higher education and other universities in Western countries, it is rare that scholarships are even offered to undergraduate students or masters by coursework students. The statistics from RUN (i-graduate, 2014) showed that among six regional Australian universities in RUN, only 8% of international students at the undergraduate level were offered scholarships, and 4% were at the PGT level.

However, of all 18 interviewees who were enrolled in undergraduate programs and masters by coursework courses at UTAS, seven were offered a UTAS scholarship when applying. All those seven were offered “a 25% reduction in registered tuition fees for the duration of the course”. Interviewees pointed out that international students who had good academic records could easily get this scholarship when applying, since it is offered to a large number of students. It was also the reason that some of them accepted the UTAS offer and rejected those from other Australian universities, even those from the Go8 institutions.

One interviewee was studying a Master of Computing at UTAS, and made this comment, “I have had a 25% discount on my tuition fees. All international students in natural sciences at UTAS seem to have this scholarship.... [Another Australian university] did not offer me a scholarship. Thus, I chose UTAS” (IV14). In addition, students in joint education programs with satisfactory grades from the initial few years of study in China could be offered this scholarship as well. Interviewees stated that even if they did not gain a scholarship when applying to UTAS, a wide range of scholarships were still available for them after they commenced their UTAS courses.

Unlike self-financed undergraduates or master’s degree course seekers, doctor’s degree seekers paid more attention to the availability of scholarships than to tuition fees. Two doctoral students were offered full scholarship respectively from UTAS and the Chinese Government. This kind of full scholarship was a decisive factor for them when choosing to commence a doctor’s degree rather than get a job (see section 6.9.3). Of those two Ph.D. candidates, the one who completed his bachelor’s degree with honours at UTAS indicated that for students graduated from UTAS, it was quite easy to successfully gain a UTAS full scholarship if they wanted to continue study in a Ph.D. program at UTAS.

This finding is in alignment with previous research (Andressen, 1991; Daily, Farewell, & Kumar, 2010; Jenkins, 2007; Li & Bray, 2007; Lu et al., 2009). That is, the availability of scholarships has a significant bearing on the choice of overseas university. However, this is the only research in the context of decisions made specifically by Chinese international students for UTAS, a regional Australian university.

10.2.3 University Reputation

University reputation also has an impact on Chinese international student choices for UTAS.

The motivation listed in the questionnaire, “university reputation/ranking”, was important with a mean of 3.46, and its ranking was No.4 amongst all seven reasons. Its mean value revealed that UTAS’s reputation/ranking was good among the Chinese international students; however, in terms of its mean ranking, UTAS’s reputation/ranking was not a dominant reason for the choice of UTAS, and Chinese international students may have expected to enrol at a more prestigious Australian university.

In interviews, the importance for this factor was acknowledged by the majority of participants. Interviewees gave a wide range of interpretations on “university reputation” however, which can be sorted into two main groups, it being a university with recognised prestige and influence about the university’s reputation coming from diverse channels.

10.2.3.1 Great prestige

12 interviewees mentioned the great prestige of UTAS, and were particularly focused on the following aspects of it: the university’s ranking, the fact that it is a state university, the fact that it has a long history, and the international recognition of its qualifications.

(1) The university’s ranking

The university’s ranking was a key point mentioned by six interviewees. Chinese international students usually assign great value to a university with a high ranking, and they prefer to enrol at one. In interviews, participants stated that they had paid special attention to the world and domestic rankings of UTAS in their decision making. One interviewee was satisfied with his choice of UTAS.

I felt that UTAS was a very prestigious institution. Its world ranking was roughly in the top 300. Only the best two universities in [hometown] were in the same ranking level with UTAS.... UTAS’s world ranking was better than (most) universities in China. (IV12)

Considering university rankings on the Australian basis, UTAS was known by the Chinese international students as four-star in the five-star ranking system, and a good Australian university. Some interviewees were told by education agents that all Australian universities had similar high-quality education, so they were reassured that UTAS’s education quality was also good. Other interviewees stated how they had gone on to make a comparison among four-star universities. One interviewee remarked, “at the same star level, university qualities were similar. Because there was no big difference between them, I chose UTAS” (IV4); while another one said, “I found UTAS had a good ranking amongst four-star Australian universities” (IV21).

This finding is supported by other studies (Gong & Huybers, 2015; Jenkins, 2007; Lu et al., 2009; Su & Harrison, 2016). Jenkins (2007) looked at the association between regional American universities and institutional choice by international students. My research has

explored this factor in Australia, and also narrowed the target group to Chinese international students. One more recent study (Gong & Huybers, 2015) stated that Australia's university rankings have been negatively affected by the 2014 Times Higher Education ranking funding cuts, claiming that Chinese international students could be discouraged against enrolling in an Australian university. This however, has been shown to not be the case in my study.

(2) A state university

UTAS is also considered as of high quality as a state university by the Chinese international students. Common sense for Chinese people dictates that a university named after a state or a province is usually a good one. One interviewee stated, "I did not look at rankings, but I chose UTAS because Tasmania only has one university. At that time, I felt that UTAS was a state university. Normally, the quality of a state university could not be bad" (IV4). There is a no research that reports on this idea, and therefore, this is a new finding in this area.

(3) A university with a long history

A university may be seen as prestigious because it has a long history, and this was highlighted by five interviewees. Some of the Chinese international students stated that they were attracted by the long history of UTAS, continuing for more than 100 years since establishment, and being one of four oldest universities in Australia. It is also "a sandstone university". Some interviewees admitted that they preferred enrolling at an old university. That universities with long histories are a draw card for students is also a new finding in this area of research.

(4) International recognition of the university's qualifications

International recognition of a university's qualifications is another way that prestige can be imputed to a university by Chinese international students. In the survey data, the fact that "the qualification is recognised in China" still showed somewhat significance, scoring a mean of 3.35 and being ranked No.5 in all seven factors for the choice of UTAS. In interviews, recognition of the university's qualifications was indicated by one participant who lived and studied in Singapore.

People in this industry in Singapore all know AMC (a specialist college of UTAS), and AMC has a good reputation.... If you tell a company in Singapore that you graduated from AMC, they think you are very good, and you will be recognised by them. (IV10)

With no attention being given to this point in prior studies, this factor is identified here for the first time.

10.2.3.2 Influence from diverse channels

Influence from diverse channels contribute a significant role in motivating the investigated

Chinese international students to study at UTAS. The statement “parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it” scored high, with a mean value of 3.16 in the survey. The importance of this factor was also witnessed in interviews, with more than half of interviewees mentioning it. Chinese international students were influenced by external information in a way that strengthened the position of UTAS in their minds, which motivated them to pursue higher education at this institution. Their sources of information were mainly suggestions from official channels, and influence from unofficial avenues.

Chinese international students place a strong degree of trust on information from official channels, which include education agencies, joint education programs, the UTAS website and UTAS Chinese representatives. Some interviewees put emphasis on the role of education agencies in information provision and persuasion. Non-profit agencies were also mentioned by interviewees. These agencies, standing for the Australian higher education sector as a whole, do not promote a specific university, but provide clients with detailed and objective suggestions about Australian higher education, and they do not charge any counselling fees for institution selection and application assistance. Profit driven international education agencies also had some input. Having close partnerships with UTAS, a large number of education agencies in China assist UTAS in recruiting Chinese international students. Students who had little information on Australian international higher education resort to them and take their advice seriously.

The second official channel is joint education programs. Interviewees revealed that not all Chinese international students in joint education programs between UTAS and other higher education institutions eventually end up at UTAS. Promotional information about UTAS that they came across during their course had a profound effect on those who came to UTAS. This will be discussed further in section 10.4.1.

The third official approach is the UTAS website, which was mentioned by a few interviewees. Chinese international students stated that they checked information from the UTAS website in order to decide whether to accept their UTAS offer. The Chinese representative of UTAS is another official approach taken. This individual mainly helped Chinese international students resolve issues in the UTAS application process and effectively attracted them to UTAS.

Interviewees also stated a preference to enrol at UTAS because of information from unofficial channels, like friends, relatives, spouses or parents. To some extent, the influence from unofficial channels could be stronger and more direct than ones from official channels, because there exists a strong element of trust between the students and the people who provided that information. Suggestions from friends or relatives who were UTAS alumni or were studying or working at UTAS tended to exert heavy influence on the students’ choice for UTAS, since information provided was based on real and personal experiences as “insiders”.

Additionally, an opportunity to be together again with their family members who were at UTAS was extremely appealing for specific students (see section 7.9 and section 8.6.2). Some interviewees even mentioned the dominant and only reason for them to choose UTAS was that

their partner or friends were coming to study at UTAS as well. Suggestions from well-educated family members was always accepted by the students. Parental impact was rather weak on university choice because Chinese parents focus more on life-changing choices rather than smaller details. Another reason might be that Chinese parents lack relevant information on university selection, so they bring their child to an education agency to seek more professional consultation about the details of their study. However, interviewees who were around or under 18 years old when coming to UTAS pointed out that it was their parents' recommendation which they relied on at that time, as they were too young to make a decision by themselves.

There are limited existing studies (Duan, 1997; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002; Shanka et al., 2006) which identify referents on the higher education institution choice of international students. Research within the context of regional Australian higher education is also limited to a report from RUN (i-graduate, 2014), which indicated 10 influences impacting international students on the choice of regional Australian universities. My research finding is consistent with the top six influences in that report, but it goes a step further in categorising these influences into official and unofficial channels.

10.3 Quicker and Easier Offers

One of the most intriguing reasons in this research for selecting UTAS is that it is quicker and easier to get offers from UTAS compared to other Australian universities. A considerable number of questionnaire respondents chose this reason, and hence this factor had a mean of 3.67, and was ranked No.3, quite high among all seven reasons for choosing UTAS. The key role of quicker and easier offers was also reflected in the semi-structured interviews.

More than half (N=12) of the interview participants stated that this factor directly brought about their decision to come to UTAS. Interviewees commented that they applied to a few Australian universities at the same time, but their UTAS offer was the quickest one. They always accepted the earliest offer. Two underlying reasons pointed out by interviewees were utilised to explain this preference behaviour. The first factor was that they believed that the rapid response of offer stood for the high quality of this university.

My target was a Go8, or five-star Australian university. UTAS was only used by me to practice (拿来练手, ná lái liàn shǒu). But I had never thought that the UTAS offer would be so fast. One week after the application submission, I got my UTAS offer. Two months after gaining my UTAS offer, I got an offer for [one of the Go8 universities], and then another two months later, I was almost ready to leave China and come to Australia, and an offer from [another Go8 university] just arrived. If the offers from these two Go8 universities came earlier, I might not have accepted the UTAS offer.... I was very content with the quick offer from UTAS. UTAS service was very efficient. At least at that time I felt UTAS cared about me. (IV3)

Another reason the students acted on their UTAS offer was that they were not sure whether they would get other offers from mainland Australian universities, so they accepted the earliest offer. This strategy pulled Chinese international students to UTAS. There appears to be no precedents for this important finding in the relevant literature.

Apart from this, the ease of the UTAS offer was also very attractive to the Chinese international students. Interviewees interpreted the ease of UTAS offers in two different ways. These will be explored below.

The low university entry requirements made it easier for students to get an offer from UTAS compared to other Australian universities. One interviewee wanted to undertake a program in a Master of Accounting at an Australian university, but said, “if you want to be enrolled in a Master of Accounting in [university], a metropolitan Australian university, you need a bachelor’s degree related to Accounting, but mine is not” (IV6). UTAS however, did not require a bachelor’s degree related to Accounting as a prerequisite to be eligible for the offer of a Master of Accounting. This may explain why a large number of Chinese international students enrol in this course at UTAS. For those Chinese international students who had thoughts of change their majors, low university entry requirements were also a strong pull to UTAS. Additionally, in terms of joint education programs, those run by UTAS and Chinese higher education institutions had comparatively lower university entry requirements than some other programs between higher education institutions in other Western countries and China.

The easy application process was another aspect which attracted Chinese international students to UTAS. One interviewee mentioned, “UTAS did not require an application fee, but other universities all needed it and it was very expensive” (IV20). Only electronic supporting documents were required in the UTAS application, which was mentioned as an advantage that encouraged students to apply.

After filling out all application forms on the website of [one of Australian universities], I needed to send all paper supporting materials by mail to that university as well. But I did not know that, so that I did not send them. I thought I had completed the application process. In the process of waiting for its offer, I got the UTAS offer. I had only submitted electronic supporting materials to UTAS rather than paper ones. (IV6)

Academia is largely silent on the role of the rapidity and the ease of university offers and international students’ final choice of university. Hobsons Solutions (2016) mentioned one point from the results of the ISS in 2016, saying that a rapid response from universities met international student expectations, otherwise they risked missing out on those prospective students. My study specified this to the offer response from university, and explicitly related this factor to the particular selection of university. Existing literature (Lee, 2013; Li & Bray, 2007) has examined the possibility of meeting entry requirements among universities in different countries, but there has been little discussion about entry requirements distinctions between UTAS and other Australian universities, such as that identified here in my research.

10.4 Flexible Study Pathways

The flexible study pathways at UTAS are tailored for the needs of Chinese international students from diverse backgrounds, and have led a number of them into a variety of its programs. Joint education programs are a core and official approach used by UTAS to bring Chinese students in universities located in China and other countries here. Students interested in specialist fields have been motivated to undertake such specialist courses at UTAS. Research opportunities have helped other Chinese students undertake higher degrees by research. Credit transfer acceptance from UTAS has been a crucial motivation for other Chinese international students who are in joint education programs, and for those who have different study pathways from different countries or education levels. If Chinese students have poor previous academic records or would like to transfer to other majors, they believe UTAS is comparatively easier to graduate from. Each of these will be considered in more detail below.

10.4.1 Joint Education Programs

Joint education programs are a powerful arrangement that bring Chinese international students from cooperative higher education institutions to UTAS. All 10 interviewees who were in joint education programs admitted that engagement in these programs was the initial reason for them to come to UTAS. The value set by them on this transfer from another university to UTAS however varied. Seven of them acknowledged that they came to UTAS because it would be a very smooth, easy and convenient transfer on the basis of the agreement between UTAS and their sending schools. When students were in these programs in China they had classes from UTAS lecturers or overseas study workshops that promoted UTAS, and some Chinese universities even required students to adopt the UTAS online learning system. This helped the students develop a comprehensive understanding of UTAS study, and it left them with a very good impression of UTAS.

In addition, English language training is part of these programs and it helped some students meet the English entry requirements for UTAS. All of these interviewees cited that they only applied to UTAS, because they had been given an offer by UTAS due to the cooperation relationship. Also, because of the partnership, their previous universities and agencies would help them process application documents.

Additionally, some of the students recognised that UTAS seemed to be the only overseas university choice for them in their joint education programs. One male interviewee and one female took into consideration applying to other overseas universities, however, they realised that their credits from Chinese universities would not be fully transferred to these universities (the detailed discussion in section 10.4.4), and more time would need to be spent there than at UTAS for the same level of qualification.

Flexible entrance is also beneficial to some Chinese students who had not been ready to come

to UTAS at the scheduled time. One interviewee who was in a “2+2” joint bachelor’s degree program with UTAS remarked that she would have come to UTAS after two-years of study in China, but her IELTS scores had not reached the entry requirements of UTAS at that time, and therefore she chose to keep studying for the first semester of her third year course still at her Chinese university. Only after that was she able to come to UTAS.

A small amount of literature (Bodycott, 2009; Fang & Wang, 2014; Jenkins, 2007) has provided valuable insight into the decisive role of joint education programs when international students chose certain higher education institutions. However, the expected value that transfer to overseas higher education institutions has brought to international students was not detected in previous research, although it has been brought to light here in my research.

10.4.2 Specialist Courses

Specialist courses also have drawn Chinese international students to UTAS. These students, especially those who intended to study specialist courses in maritime studies, chose UTAS because their courses were only offered at AMC, and AMC is a part of UTAS. The particularity of these courses limited their choice of Australian higher education institutions. All five interviewees and two survey respondents of the open-ended section who were undertaking courses from AMC revealed this fact.

The underlying reasons these students chose specialist courses mainly centred on three issues. First, gaining qualifications in these disciplines drew the students in. One interviewee cited that not only in the context of Australia but also globally, the course offered only at UTAS was a degree with a certificate, whereas in other countries he would only obtain a certificate without a degree. The second issue was the world-class fame of the specialist colleges or disciplines, which attracted Chinese international students who were interested in these fields to enrol at UTAS as they were in the hope of receiving quality education abroad. Third, choosing these specialist courses had a direct link to their career goals, such as a job promotion. Qualifications in those fields would directly help them to better achieve their career goals.

Specialist courses are a motivator for Chinese international students choosing to study at a regional Australian university, and this is an under-studied area in this field. This study pioneers this finding.

10.4.3 Research Opportunities

Research opportunities is also a factor in Chinese international students’ decisions for higher degree programs at UTAS. All three Ph.D. candidates in the interviews, and one respondent in the open-ended survey section commented on this.

Unlike Chinese international students who chose coursework programs at UTAS, people who were interested in PGR programs focused their choices entirely on their research field or

potential future supervisor's research interests before applying. Universities where those research fields were located or academics were active became the targets for those students. One interviewee adopted this approach.

My supervisor in my Chinese university suggested for me to contact an academic at UTAS, who is my current supervisor, and to see whether there was any research project (available for me) there. They had cooperated on one project before. So, I contacted the UTAS academic. He/She was very willing to accept me as his/her student. (IV22)

Two other interviewees followed their research interests when looking for universities. The final reason for picking UTAS rather than other Australian universities was that UTAS had what they wanted to research, while research fields in other Australian universities did not match their research interests.

Jenkins (2007) provided two examples of higher degree by research students identifying contact with a professor beforehand as one of the major reasons for them to choose their regional American university. My research finding is in line with that study but it also contains research opportunities as a reason for choosing a regional university.

10.4.4 Acceptance of Credit Transfer

Acceptance of credit transfer is also a crucial factor that encouraged enrolment at UTAS of Chinese international students who are from various study pathways. There was a mean value of 3.19 for this factor in the analysis of the questionnaire, indicating its high importance. What's more, roughly half of interviewees also chose UTAS because of its approach to credit transfer.

Interview conversations indicated that UTAS accepts transferred credits very widely, which cover qualifications from various institutions, from different countries, and for distinct education levels. Virtually all interviewees who had credit transferred were from different institutions. The majority of those interviewees transferred their credits from joint education programs. Credits transferred to UTAS were from higher education institutions located in China, Singapore and Australia. Diploma credits were transferred to progress bachelor's degrees at UTAS, and UTAS also accepted credits transferred from bachelor's degree programs to same level courses, or to master's degree programs.

Interviewees stressed the importance of credit transfer by noting that they had decided that they would only choose overseas higher education institutions which could accept their previous credits. Preference of credit transfer for them was based on time concerns. This was also a reason for them not applying to some metropolitan Australian universities, since they would not accept their previous credits, which would potentially result in wasting time.

The credits of my Advanced Diploma from TAFE could only be transferred to

UTAS. If I still stayed in Tasmania, I could save one year at UTAS, which was good.... In addition, if I chose another university, I could not get a credit transfer and would waste half a year applying, so I would have to spend 1.5 years more in another university for a bachelor's degree than at UTAS. Thus, I chose UTAS. (IV8)

Only two past studies (Jenkins, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) have paid attention to the importance of credit transfer on international students' decision making. Jenkins (2007) identified that acceptance of transfer credits led international students to choose a regional American university. Mazzarol and Soutar's push-pull theory (2002) indicated that one of pull factors influencing host institution selection of international students was the institution's willingness to recognise their previous qualifications. My research strongly endorses these two research findings and affirms them in the context of Chinese international student choices for UTAS.

10.4.5 Ease of Graduation

Ease of graduation from UTAS greatly influences Chinese international students as well. Its importance was indicated in interviews. Three interviewees in this study reflected that after collecting available resources and comparing relevant information about the ease of graduation from different Australian universities, UTAS was comparatively easier to graduate from. This played a vital role in the process of selecting UTAS, though it was not a dominant motivation that interviewees indicated.

Interviewees had accessed this information from education agencies, experienced acquaintances, or from the internet. It centred around smooth graduation from an Australian university, but it consisted of reasons for two kinds of students, those with poor academic records and those who needed to change majors. This was like a "pragmatic rationality considering their circumstances, their personal ability and the possibility of their desire and expectations" (Lee, 2013, p. 331) which formed their strategic choice.

Of the three, two were concerned with ease of graduation, although both were enrolled in joint education programs and could easily come to UTAS for study. This might be because they were not students who always achieved high academic performance. Both of them found that UTAS was easier to graduate from than other Australian universities that they had compared it with. One believed that universities in the Go8 have a high failure rate for her units at UTAS. Another one of these three interviewees wanted to change her major and therefore considered ease of graduation. Her case is also pertinent to course choice at UTAS, so it will be interpreted in the next chapter.

There is no literature examining the relationship between the ease of graduation and international students' university selection, and so this is a unique finding from this study.

10.5 Immigration Prospects

Immigration prospects are a crucial motivation behind some Chinese international students choosing UTAS as their study destination. This factor was clearly highlighted in interviews, although it was not listed as a reason in the questionnaire. For some of them, immigration prospects were the single reason they pursued higher education at UTAS, a regional Australian university; while for others, immigration prospects were the dominant reason, but other reasons were also considered by them in the process of selecting an Australian university.

Chinese international students in the first group had a strong desire to immigrate to Australia, and seeking PR was the only reason they choose to study at a regional Australian university. They confirmed that education was only an instrument for their future immigration plans, which was also found in the research of Appave and Cholewinski (2008), and Tan (2012). Selecting UTAS for these students shows their conscious choice of university based on ease of immigration pathway. In interviews, the question was asked, “why would you choose UTAS rather than enrol in one of the Australian mainland universities?” The answer of one of them was representative, “studying at those Australian mainland universities cannot help me immigrate into Australia” (IV6). Immigration to Australia was the primary intention for them from the start.

When these students considered obtaining a Skilled Independent visa, they initially targeted an occupation in the eligible skilled occupation list which provided the easiest and most reasonable pathway for them to get PR. They then figured out their own particular occupation-related “immigration course” among different Australian universities. Immigration course is an unofficial term, but one widely used among Chinese international students. Immigration courses will be discussed more in the next chapter.

The other requirement for this visa that students paid close attention to was 60-point threshold (see section 9.5). A degree from an Australian institution would help them gain points. With difficulties reaching 60 points however, the extra five points that can be gained from regional study experience played a significant role in their choice of university. Thus, selecting higher education in Australia, and particularly at a regional Australian university was a key for their future immigration application. In addition, they had ascertained that UTAS was a wise choice for them among all Australian universities because they believed the regional attributes of UTAS would benefit them in other ways too. More immigration opportunities and benefits are offered by Tasmania as a regional state, such as extra points, and a Tasmanian state nomination for those Chinese international students who were not able to apply for a Skilled Independent visa but were interested in a Skilled Nominated visa (see section 9.5). A major prerequisite for these Tasmanian regional opportunities and benefits however are based on applicants graduating from a higher education institution in Tasmania. As the only university in Tasmania, UTAS therefore became the preferential immigration pathway for these students.

Another group of Chinese international students who considered immigrating to Australia were

also attracted by other reasons, and may or may not have had a concrete plan for immigration before coming to Australia. The benefits of studying at UTAS for future immigration was clearly noted by them when selecting Australian universities, and it led them choosing UTAS, a regional Australian university.

A number of studies (e.g. Bodycott, 2009; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007) have identified university selection based on post-graduation immigration prospects as the factors influencing Chinese international students, but discussion (Baas, 2006; Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Su & Harrison, 2016; Tan, 2012) on the association between immigration prospects and international student university choice have been limited. The results of the ISS 2016 (Hobsons Solutions, 2016) revealed that Australian “migration pathways were not a factor that can be used to differentiate an individual university” (p. 22). However, my research has found conversely, that the relationship between university selection and migration pathways have directly led Chinese international students to choose UTAS. Baas (2006) and Tan (2012) discovered a close relationship between Chinese and Indian international student preference for studying at regional Australian universities and their immigration prospects, and my research provides a more specific focus of Chinese international students and their choice of UTAS.

10.6 Conclusion

This chapter has comprehensively explored the fifth logical facet in the literature-derived framework for making choices, Chinese international students’ choice of UTAS, a regional Australian university. It has systematically presented results and discussion in relation to all of the motivating factors leading to this higher education institution choice, as investigated in survey and questionnaire. The following four major influencing factors, and the eight sub-factors, have drawn Chinese international students to UTAS. Some of these factors are so powerful and effective that they solely and independently entice Chinese international students to come, while other students are driven simultaneously by more than one influencing cause.

- Higher quality-cost ratio
 - More competitive tuition fees
 - Availability of scholarships
 - University reputation
- Quicker and easier offers
- Flexible study pathways
 - Joint education programs
 - Specialist courses
 - Research opportunities
 - Acceptance of credit transfer
 - Ease of graduation
- Immigration prospects

It has been found here that unlike the first number of choices interpreted in the last four chapters, answers from respondents for the choice of UTAS were highly consistent and centralised into a few key points. These included several of the distinguishing attributes of UTAS, and some advantages of it for Chinese international students compared to universities on mainland Australia.

Interpretation and discussion of these crucial factors of Chinese international students' UTAS choice contributes significantly to addressing the first research question (what are the factors influencing the choices of Chinese international students in their decision to enrol in a regional Australian university?) under the primary research objective (to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university).

The decision making of international students concerning higher education institution is an under-researched field where very limited studies exist. This study pioneers in this area and provides insight into specific aspects of it, including examining the motivations for Chinese international students selecting UTAS, a regional Australian university.

Chapter 11 Results and Discussion for Theme– Course

11.1 Introduction

This chapter will delve into some of the motivating factors behind Chinese international student selection of a university course, which is the last choice made by them by the logic of the literature-derived framework for making choices (see Figure 11.1).

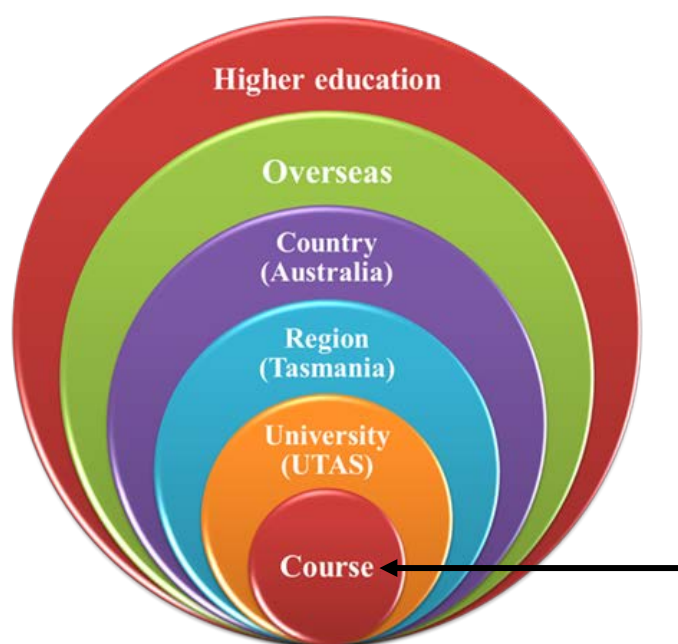


Figure 11.1. The choice of course within the literature-derived framework for making choices.

The motivations of Chinese international students in choosing their courses were investigated in both the survey and the interview. In the survey, the question concerned “the reasons why you chose to study your current course” with eight reasons and an open-ended section used to collect answers from survey respondents. The final number of responses to this question in the survey was 456. The descriptive statistics summary of the survey motivation data for this course choice is presented in Table 11.1. Reasons are listed based on the sequence from the smallest mean value to the largest one. Also, in order to present the spread of responses, standard deviation for each factor and distribution of five-point Likert scales for each factor are shown in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1

Descriptive Statistics Summary of the Survey Data for the Choice–Course¹

Factor	Mean	SD	VI	I	UI	VUI	NC
Personal interest	3.89	1.085	31.1%	42.3%	17.5%	2.2%	6.8%
Future immigration opportunity	3.61	1.296	28.5%	34.9%	19.1%	4.6%	12.9%
Course reputation	3.41	1.219	16.2%	39.9%	26.5%	3.1%	14.3%
High employment rate of graduates from this course	3.41	1.258	18.9%	36.6%	26.3%	3.3%	14.9%
Promotion from a previous/current job	3.23	1.324	17.1%	31.6%	28.1%	4.2%	19.1%
Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	3.21	1.32	15.8%	33.1%	27.4%	4.2%	19.5%
My previous university has this joint education program with UTAS	3.14	1.536	25.0%	23.2%	20.4%	3.7%	27.6%
Easy to graduate from	3.04	1.279	11.4%	28.5%	33.3%	5.9%	20.8%

Face-to-face individual interviews were adopted to examine the motivating factors behind Chinese international student course choice. In total, 23 participants took part in these interviews.

Reasons listed in the questionnaire, and new factors identified in interviews, as well as the open-ended questionnaire section were joined and grouped by topic. The following sections will elaborate on these factors, and compare them with previous research findings.

11.2 Personal Interest

Personal interest in the course is the leading intrinsic driver for Chinese international students when choosing an academic course. Interest was seen by survey respondents to be the most crucial factor under the choice of university course, came out with the highest mean score, 3.89, amongst all eight items. The significance of this factor was also presented in interviews that approximately half of the participants mentioned. That is, personal interest was the main reason for them to undertake their current courses at UTAS. Chinese international students followed their heart to pursue interests when choosing course, which is one of the more unexpected findings in this study, since this generation of Chinese international students shows deep consideration for filial piety (see section 11.4.2) and is greatly influenced by utilitarianism (see sections 11.3, 11.5, 11.6, 11.7). Here we see that they have also been led by their own interests when choosing university programs.

¹ SD = Standard Deviation; VI = Very Important; I = Important; UI = Unimportant; VUI = Very Unimportant; NC = Never Considered.

Interview conversation revealed that different Chinese international students were guided by different degrees of interest in their courses. Nine interviewees elaborated on their strong personal interest in their discipline of study when choosing to enrol in it. Of these nine, most male students were interested in Engineering, as one male commented, “I am very interested in Engineering. To major in Electrical Power Engineering will help me understand the world better” (IV16). Women tended to show more interests in Social Sciences and Humanities, as one female interviewee said, “in terms of Computing, I felt girls are not good at programming, so I did not choose Computing.... Environment was an interesting major for me” (IV21). Chinese international students who were undertaking specialist courses, such as maritime courses in AMC showed great interest in these courses as well.

Other Chinese international students’ interest in their particular discipline was driven by the desire to change the current situation in China.

I initially planned to go back to China after graduation and to change China’s environment.... I would like to know the (Australian) policies and laws here, as well as about some approaches to environment protection.... This knowledge could be imported into China.... The environment of my hometown is bad, so I always have had this desire.... I am an environmentalist, from the very beginning. Initially, choosing this major for me was not for money. This was purely my interest, that is, I wanted to change the current situation (of China). (IV4)

For the other group of Chinese international students, the course they were undertaking was not the most intriguing for them, though they still liked it. Limitations had stopped them being able to enrol in a preferred course. One interviewee frankly admitted that he would have preferred to study Food Engineering, but he could not meet the required the scores of the National College Entrance Examination for this major at an ideal Chinese university. In order to enter this university, he had to choose a joint education program in the field of Computing run by a Chinese university and UTAS. He stated being a little bit interested in Computing, but not a great deal.

Very few previous studies (Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Wu, 2014) have identified personal interest as a motivation behind international student course selection. A report about the ISS 2016 (Hobsons Solutions, 2016) revealed that 85% of international students chose a subject at an Australian university based mainly on their personal interest, but that report did not focus on Chinese international students. Wu (2014) indicated that personal interest had the highest mean score rated by mainland Chinese international students for undertaking master’s programs at three British universities. But the interest mentioned in her research was career related interest, which is different from personal interest in a subject of study. Chinese international students choosing their course based on personal interest in a particular discipline has for the first time been identified in this study.

11.3 Immigration Prospects

Immigration prospects, particularly immigration courses at Australian universities, are a major attraction for Chinese international students. A considerable number of survey respondents rated the item of “future immigration opportunity” as a “very important” or an “important” factor, and therefore its mean value was high at 3.61. It ranked as the second significant reason among all eight motivations under course choice. In interviews, a quarter of participants highlighted it as well.

In interviews, participants mainly mentioned one important aspect of immigration, that is, the so-called immigration courses. As an unofficial term widely used among Chinese international students, immigration courses are Australian university courses which have related occupations on the Skilled Occupations List for the Skilled Independent visa, as outlined by the Australian DIBP. These courses are designed based on requirements for the Skilled Independent visa. For example, people who apply for this visa are required to complete at least two academic years of study, and hence, the duration of these immigration courses is at least two years. Interviewees reported that most students studying in these immigration courses are Chinese. As one interviewee mentioned, “90% of students in the Master of Professional Accounting at UTAS are Chinese” (IV6).

These so-called immigration courses referred to by the Chinese international students chiefly include courses in Accounting, Engineering, Computing, Nursing, and Teaching. It has been proved from UTAS data (2017a) that the majority of Chinese international students at UTAS are enrolled in two faculties, TSBE (51%) and SET (28%) (see Figure 1.5), where these immigration courses are mainly located. Additionally, according to the latest UTAS data (2017a), the top three enrolments for Chinese onshore students in 2016 at UTAS were in Master of Professional Accounting (Specialisation), Bachelor of Business, and Master of Information Technology and Systems (see Table 1.1), which are all immigration courses and account for roughly 40% of all Chinese international student enrolments at UTAS. The understanding of immigration courses and professions related to these courses by the Chinese international students are almost entirely consistent with Australian skilled immigration policies, which can be seen in the latest Migration Programme Report (DIBP, 2016). The Report shows that the roles of Accountant, Software Engineer, Registered Nurse, and External Auditor are in the top five occupations in the skill stream outcome in 2015-2016.

Interviewees who expect to gain Australian PR also elaborated on a course selection process among different immigration courses. Most of them chose Accounting immigration courses through a process of elimination rather than on the basis of their own interests.

Before I came here, my course choices were between Education and Accounting. I really hated Accounting. Education agencies told me if I wanted to study in Education for the immigration purpose, I had to study in an Early Childhood Education course. But it would be difficult for me to understand what kids said....

Although I like kids, I no longer wanted to choose Early Childhood Education after finding out about these things. So I had to choose Accounting.... If immigration had not been my purpose, I absolutely would not have chosen an Accounting major. (IV6)

The determination to take a certain immigration course for some Chinese international students was “a crystal of wisdom” valued by the whole family, and especially by relatives living in Australia.

My mum downloaded the Skilled Occupation List for Australian immigration online. After analysing the List, she said Accounting is a major related to this list now and in the future. My cousin had been living in Australia for a long time. He told me that if I chose an Accounting major, and passed the Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) exams in the future, I could get a job with a very high salary in Australia. (IV6)

Some research (Ekanayake & Jackling, 2014; Jackling, 2007) undertaken by Beverley Jackling has particularly focused on international student choices for an Accounting major in Australia, and has shown an established nexus between education and migration, although there has been no specified term used to name those courses in their studies. By 2007, international students who had gained an Accounting qualification in Australian higher education easily obtained PR based on the point system at that time, but the issue of those international Accounting graduates was that they were not sufficiently “work ready” to be considered for graduate employment (Jackling, 2007). As a “cash cow” to the Australian higher education sector, the Accounting discipline has led to a reform of the skilled migration policy in 2010, which weakened the nexus between education and migration in Australia (Ekanayake & Jackling, 2014). My research is in agreement with findings, but mine concentrates on the exploration of the relationship between immigration and course selection from student perspectives, instead of from the view of the policies involved.

11.4 Course Reputation

Course reputation also has considerable influence on Chinese international students’ decision of a university course as well. Two significant factors occurred in concert for the students to enrol in a particular course. The first was that this course was known by them, and also, that its good reputation had left an impression on them. The ultimate decision made by Chinese international students depended on information exchanged between students and the course itself, and between students and their influencers (parents, relatives, education agents, or peers).

11.4.1 Course Reputation

Course reputation attracts some students to enrol in those courses. In fact, this questionnaire item was seen by respondents as an important factor, with a mean score of 3.41. More than one

fifth of all interviewees admitted that they had been influenced by good course reputation when choosing it. Good reputation is equal to high-quality education in the perception of Chinese international students. They primarily were motivated by the world-class reputation of specialist courses and superior disciplines.

As mentioned before in this chapter, several of the students had a strong desire to take specialist courses on the basis of their personal interest or career interests. World-class course reputation reinforced their ideas to enrol in them, and it also helped them finalise their decision about where to take those courses. Four interviewees highlighted the great fame of the specialist institute, AMC, where most specialist courses at UTAS are located. It was in fact the dominant reason that they enrolled in these courses.

The world-class reputation of superior disciplines also attracts students to courses in those disciplines. This is related to student interest. If Chinese international students were interested in a certain discipline, they would search that discipline's ranking or attempt to find out which university had expertise in it.

Existing literature (Chen, 2007b; Fang & Wang, 2014) that identifies course reputation as an influencing factor for international student course choice is scarce. After investigating Chinese students from four other East-Asian countries who were in Canadian universities, Chen (2007b) found that factors, such as prestigious degrees, and a good reputation were embedded in the choice of PGR programs. Program reputation also influenced Chinese student choices for a particular transnational higher education program, which has been revealed in the research of Fang and Wang (2014). My research finding is consistent with the above two studies, but the difference is that mine identifies the underlying factor of high reputation as a concern for the students; and my research population encompasses Chinese international students from diverse study pathways and in different education levels.

11.4.2 Influence From Family, Friends or Education Agents

Choice of course by the Chinese international students is influenced by a wide range of people, embracing family, friends and education agents. With a mean value of 3.21, "parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it" ranked No.6 amongst all of the eight reasons to choose to study their current course. The significance of this factor might have been underrated by survey respondents because as seen in the interviews, the low ranking of this survey item may be interpreted differently. This is, that the referents could have just been influenced about course choice instead of actively being recommended them. To phrase this more specifically, I reword it to read, "influence from family, friends or education agents".

Broadly speaking, Chinese international students were the decision makers in their university course selection, rather than their parents or other influencers. This is in line with prior work (Pimpa, 2002). Even the younger school leavers mentioned this point. Unlike the decisions of higher education, overseas study, Australia as the destination country for some Chinese international students which were made by their parents, the course choice tended to be a

personal decision with the reason of the non-life changing attribute.

While parents were not the decision makers, the views of parents still had a significant effect on the students' choices. Interviewees reflected that parental influence primarily centred on two areas. The first was choosing a major by following in a parent's career footsteps, and was mentioned by four interviewees. This is a phenomenon undoubtedly evolving from traditional Chinese culture. There is an expectation from parents for children to engage in the same career or field. On the other hand, Chinese parents expect that their child will have a smooth life, including a good career, because if they work in the same field with them, the parents can help them for longer.

As a continuation of this idea, some parents chose rather to provide useful suggestions for their child rather than directly requiring them to choose a course in the same field. One commented, "my father is an engineer, so he hoped I could enrol in a practical major rather than some majors which would be difficult to apply in future work" (IV16). This is consistent with Pimpa's research findings (2002) that family expectations can play a significant role in Thai students' when choosing to undertake Business studies. However, four interviewees in my study who had mentioned parental influence on their course decision were not only studying in the Business field, but also in the areas of Science, Engineering & Technology.

The second type of parental influence was parents helping with course selection. One interviewee decided to not undertake a master's course in a new field since "my parents thought that it would not be easy for me to study units in a familiar field in English, let alone transferring my major. They were worried that I could not study this new major well" (IV9).

Apart from parental influence, siblings, relatives and friends were also involved in the process of course selection. The influence from this group extended from choices to pursue higher education, to going overseas, to selecting Australia or even Tasmania as a destination, to choosing UTAS as their final selection of university. Chinese international students usually sought suggestions from well-educated family members when not sure of their course selection, since they believed these had authority based on their own successful educational experience (see section 8.6.1).

My uncle helped me choose my UTAS major.... But only that uncle was well-educated. He had graduated from [a prestigious Chinese university].... My uncle has already immigrated to [a Western country]. I asked him to choose one from three majors, which I was interested in, that is, Marketing, Human Resource Management, and Enterprise Management.... He suggested Marketing, because he said everything in business is related to the market. If one thing is not related to market, it is not in business. So I listened to his decision. (IV17)

Also, suggestions from siblings and friends who have studied or worked at UTAS were always accepted by the students because they believed that these referents were "insiders" in their fields, and so information that they provided must be first-hand and worth following (see

section 10.2.3.2). This idea is in alignment with Pimpa's work (2002), as well as the study from Lord and Dawson (2002).

Influence from friends expanded beyond their suggestions on course selection. The students were likely to undertake overseas university actually physically alongside their friends. This was rooted in seeking a sense of belonging (see section 6.8.2 and section 8.6.2), which is consistent with one of Kember's findings (2016) on Hong Kong students' course choice.

The influence of education agents should also not be neglected. Interviewees indicated that they often brought any of their hesitations about course selection to education agents, hoping to receive direction about the most suitable course for them. Information about courses provided by agents was deemed trustworthy, and treated as the most up to date source of relevant information. This is similar to Pimpa's finding (2002), that education agents provide the most beneficial information when Thai students are choosing a course at Australian universities.

11.5 Future Employment Prospects

Future employment prospects act as a major motivator for university course choice as well. It was not an item listed on the questionnaire, but "high employment rate of graduates from this course" and "promotion from a previous/current job" were umbrella reasons behind the factor of future employment prospects. In the interviews, a large number of participants (74%) also portrayed the significance of this factor. Interviewee views about future employment prospects included these two reasons in the questionnaire, but also extended it to two other spheres, such as an ideal future career, and gaining useful professional knowledge and skills. Additionally, four respondents of the open-ended section of the survey agreed to some of the perspectives that interviewees had relating to the role of future employment prospects in their decisions.

11.5.1 Ease of Finding a Relevant Job

Ease of finding a relevant job motivates some students to enrol in courses at UTAS. In the survey, the factor, "high employment rate of graduates from this course" scored 3.41, which ranked No.4 amongst all eight listed reasons for the course choice and showed its significance. In the interviews, five participants also noted this factor. However, those interviewees elaborated more on the broader aspect of employment rates, and the ease of finding a relevant job as a criterion for university course selection, instead of mentioning the employment rate of those formerly enrolled UTAS courses.

The five interviewees provided detailed interpretations on the ease of finding a relevant job through their candidate courses. One Social Sciences interviewee selected his current course from his course pool, "I found that for a Social Sciences major it is comparatively easier to find a job only in Education" (IV13). Three of these five interviewees chose one university course after comparing the pros and cons of two courses related to employment. One interviewee who

was in a joint education program adopted a job-oriented course selection process.

I had a diploma from [university], and then I could come to UTAS to upgrade it to bachelor's degree or to master's degree.... I choose to undertake a bachelor's degree because my friends told me it would be easier to find a job in Australia compared with holding a master's degree.... The qualification was not the most important for me. For me, no matter which degree I got, the only thing I would need to do is to find a job after graduation. (IV15)

Unlike the first two types of Chinese international students, the third type did not hesitate about course selection since they focused on access to only one course, such as a specialist course, and believed that this chosen course would help them easily get a job in that field.

The factor identified in this study is akin to the findings of a small amount of existing research on international students (Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Manns & Swift, 2016). Results from the ISS 2016 in Australian universities (Hobsons Solutions, 2016) indicated that 46% of international students chose what to study based on fields where there is high demand for employees. Manns and Swift (2016) found that for Chinese postgraduates in the U.K., the most significant reason for choosing a Business and Management course was the “percentage of graduates who get a job within six months of completing their studies” (p. 20). This research finding is from a slightly different context to these studies, that is, the context of Chinese international students undertaking all level courses at an Australian university.

11.5.2 Job Promotion

Job promotion is a motivation that guided Chinese international students to courses in their chosen career field. The item in the questionnaire, “promotion from a previous/current job” yielded a mean, of 3.23, which was ranked No.5 among all eight factors for selecting a particular course. This survey result was understandable, because for survey respondents who had never been employed before, or who were looking for opportunities in new career fields, job promotion would not be rated as an important factor. The importance of this factor was also seen in the interviews.

Chinese international students who chose a particular course due to expectations of a future job promotion usually already had a career-related qualification and work experience in those fields. They were rather clear about what kind of job was accessible to them and any job-related promotion requirements. An advanced qualification in this field could secure the expected position for them, or give them a high possibility of obtaining it. Interviewees stated that specialist courses at UTAS were most likely to attract professionals from overseas.

The desire for employment promotion for international students' university course selection has been identified in very limited relevant research beforehand (Pimpa, 2002; Wu, 2014). Pimpa (2002) found that the course choice of Thai international postgraduate students in Australian universities was related to enhancing their opportunities for career upgrading. Wu's

research (2014) revealed that mainland Chinese international students were influenced by associated work experience when considering undertaking a master's program in the U.K. However, in my study the population is international students from Greater China who were undertaking all level courses at a regional Australian university.

11.5.3 Ideal Future Career

Searching for an ideal future career is also a crucial motivation for course selection for some Chinese international students, especially those who had never had formal employment before. 10 interviewees and one respondent of the open-ended section of the questionnaire identified this factor. Also, almost all of the 10 participants in the interviews spent a large amount of time stating how their expectations towards ideal future careers had led them to choose their course at UTAS.

The ideal future career was primarily interpreted by interviewees in one of two ways, that is, in promising fields, and in specific career goals. These will be outlined below.

A promising field could draw the attention of a student and ultimately orient their course choice. Four of them elaborated on the close relationship between promising fields for them and their UTAS courses. There were three ways in which this happened. First, their understanding of a promising field could be a field that was new and had considerable potential to be developed and explored.

I would like to work in an Oceanic Bureau in China, because I am studying Marine Environment at AMC. Marine Environment actually is a big gap in China. Now China is still doing environmental management only related to air and soil but it is far from Marine Environment management. (IV4)

A few popular fields were still deemed by some Chinese international students as promising in light of their profitable nature. One interview participant undertook his bachelor's degree course in Marine and Offshore Engineering on the grounds that "the education agency recommended AMC, which was in the Marine field. The Marine field was quite hot because of petroleum.... Petroleum Engineering could help make lots of money" (IV11).

Additionally, promising fields for others meant that these fields need a large number of employees. An interviewee who had a bachelor's degree in Communication Engineering from a Chinese top university attempted to enrol in a master's degree course in Computing, and remarked, "Communication Engineering is a very top technology. It may only need a few talented people, or a department to manage it. Computing is much broader (than Communication Engineering), so I could do any jobs (in that field in the future)" (IV14).

Specific career goals were another focus when Chinese international students chose a course in Australian higher education. These specific career goals have usually led them to choose professional courses. The career goals of some Chinese international students stemmed from

their career interests.

Career goals were also based on Chinese international students' understanding of career potentials. Two interviewees who were enrolled in Accounting courses at UTAS both gave the same comments about their major, "the older you are, the better accounting job you can get" (IV9, IV15).

Chinese international students were also attracted by the clear career outcomes of some UTAS courses.

I only applied for a Master of Education (TESOL) in three universities. The reason I chose TESOL was that I would like to be an English teacher. However, if I undertook a Master of Education without specialisation, the course would not have a relevant specific field. But the direction of TESOL is very explicit, to be an English teacher. I am happy with the fact that TESOL gave me a clear future employment direction. (IV3)

There has only been a very limited amount of research (Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Manns & Swift, 2016; Pimpa, 2002) elucidating this connection of future career and university course selection for international students. Results from the ISS 2016 in Australian higher education (Hobsons Solutions, 2016) revealed that 44% of international students chose a subject primarily based on how much income they are likely to make in that industry. This financial incentive was also identified in my research. The work from Manns and Swift (2016) indicated that "a programme suitable to my career" (p. 20) was the most significant reason for Chinese international students undertaking a U.K. business and management program. Pimpa (2002) also demonstrated that future career opportunity was the factor behind Thai student course choice at Australian universities. My research integrates the findings from the above mentioned literature into a more summarised point, an ideal future career for the students. What is more, this research has concentrated primarily on one group of international students, Chinese international students, but covers all of their university courses at diverse education levels.

11.5.4 Gaining Useful Professional Knowledge and Skills

The hope of obtaining useful professional knowledge and skills also plays a significant role in the university course selection of Chinese international students. It was identified as a key factor, with general resonance among approximately 39% of interviewees and three respondents to the open-ended section of the questionnaire.

Many interviewees seemed obsessed with whether they could gain real knowledge and skills from their UTAS courses, such that would be applicable to their future employment. "After completing this course, I believe I will have a systematic understanding of Accounting knowledge.... After the course is completed, at least I will know what to do in a company in this area." (IV15) Two interviewees revealed that the reason behind their focus on useful knowledge is because previous study experience in China had not provided them with the

applicable knowledge.

For experienced employees, expectations were far more specific about matching their knowledge with their capability, which could benefit their future career. They were keen to upgrade their domain knowledge and work skills in order to become more competent members in their employments. They usually interpreted their university course as a training experience.

In this way, Chinese international students placed enormous stress on the acquisition of useful knowledge and skills, and this was reflected in their hope that their courses at UTAS would directly lead to professions in their fields of interest. The students always selected a course with a “practical” tag on it.

My father is an engineer, so he hoped I could enrol in a practical major rather than some majors which would be difficult to apply in future work.... My previous Chinese university had other joint education courses, but they were in the field of Business, which is not very practical. (IV16)

A scan of the relevant literature shows that only one research study (Wu, 2014) has addressed this issue. It claimed that mainland Chinese international students who are undertaking master's programs in the U.K. emphasised subject choice as a way to improve their career prospects, especially learned practical skills. My research finding is consistent with Wu's work, but extends the target group to international students from Greater China enrolling in all levels of university degree courses.

11.6 Joint Education Programs

Joint education programs are a factor that some Chinese international students took into account when deciding to take a course at an Australian university. In the survey, “my previous university has this joint education program with UTAS” with a mean value of 3.14. However, almost 50% of survey respondents rated this factor as “important” or “very important”. In addition, more than one third of the interviewees (N=8) acknowledged that their UTAS course decision was based on their involvement with a joint education program.

Chinese international students enrolled in joint education programs have a limited choice of course, due to the agreement between UTAS and their sending institutions. Some students had to undertake the same course that they had taken at their previous overseas institutions after arriving at UTAS. Joint education programs usually lie in specialised fields, such as Engineering on Electrical Power, and so this was understandable. However, for other students, their course choices were slightly broader. Specifically, they could choose any course in a particular school or faculty at UTAS, which was a counterpart to those at their sending school or faculty, although they were not allowed to enrol in another school or faculty. Credit transfer is a constraint for joint education program students, who sometimes have to take relevant courses at UTAS due to limitations. They were however most likely to choose the same course

at UTAS as in the previous institution.

I did not want to spend too much time in studying another major. I have basic professional knowledge of Accounting in China.... I needed time to adapt to the new environment. I came here to experience everything in the English environment, I would have lots of pressure. (IV15)

Interviewees also stated that these joint education programs were the main way that Chinese international students came to certain courses or disciplines at UTAS, such as the fields of Accounting, Computing, and Engineering. This included courses with a high proportion of Chinese international students, such as Accounting, and it also encompasses courses which had smaller rate of Chinese international students, such as Engineering. It shows that immigration courses and joint education programs are two main approaches bringing a large proportion of Chinese international student enrolments into some UTAS courses and schools or faculties.

There is a scarcity of studies identifying joint education programs as a factor in overseas university academic course selection for international students, although there is some (e.g. Fang & Wang, 2014). Thus, this may well be a new finding relating joint education programs to university course choice in Australian higher education.

11.7 Ease of Courses

Ease of courses is a key criterion for Chinese international students when choosing to enrol in a course in Australian higher education. This factor could be further divided into two sub-factors; ease of admission, and ease of graduation.

11.7.1 Ease of Admission

Ease of admission has a great amount of influence on the course choice of Chinese international students. This factor mainly affects Chinese international students who would like to change their majors and upgrade their qualifications. Three interviewees indicated this issue.

Some Chinese international students who intended to transfer to other majors and to upgrade their qualifications were looking for university courses which did not need prior training in these fields.

I did not want to be a teacher any more. I wanted to enter the business field. Only a Master of Professional Accounting did not require a prior relevant education background. This was a very important reason (for me to choose this course). This Accounting course would accept a wide range of students. (IV20)

Other requirements for enrolling in these courses were also quite easily reached by Chinese international students. The English language admission requirement of overseas university

courses are one of the biggest barriers for non-native English speakers, such as Chinese international students (see section 8.4.3). As a consequence, all except for high-flying Chinese international students tend to choose a course which had a low English language entry requirement. Interviewees stated that the English requirements for some courses, such as the Master of Professional Accounting, had “an IELTS average of 6.0 with no band lower than 6.0” (IV6), which was quite easy for them to pass. This could explain why the Faculty of Arts and Law and the Faculty of Education at UTAS had the lowest enrolments for Chinese international students (UTAS, 2017a)(see Figure 1.5), as the majority of courses in these two faculties had a very high English language entry requirements. Take the Bachelor of Education (Primary) as an example, it required “an IELTS average of 7.5 with no band lower than 7.0, and Listening and Speaking at 8.0” (UTAS, 2017).

There has been little discussion of the correlation between course choice and ease of admission in prior studies. The point that Chinese international students could enrol in a course without entry requirements including information on previous relevant education, such as the Master of Accounting, was only brushed on lightly in Tan’s study (2012) on transnational migration strategies of international students in Australia. Soo and Elliott (2010) found that Chinese international students who chose an undergraduate Business and Management program in the U.K. rated the factor of high entry requirements highly, while this was not a variable for the choice of Chinese international students in an Engineering program. However, in my research, participants, particularly students in Business and Management postgraduate courses widely believed that ease of admission had brought them into a UTAS course, and this was because they wanted to transfer majors or upgrade qualifications.

11.7.2 Ease of Graduation

Chinese international students are also influenced by ease of graduation when choosing university course. From the survey results, “easy to graduate from” accounted for a mean of just 3.04, which ranked at the bottom of all eight factors for choosing their current UTAS courses. However, interview conversations were at odds with the survey results. More than a quarter of interviewees actually highlighted the significance of this factor in their course selection. Thus, we might say that the low rank of this survey item is misleading.

Underachievers, students who had changed their majors, and job promotion seekers particularly focused on the ease of graduation from university courses. Underachievers in fact, treated the ease of graduation as one of the most important factors which had influenced them when choosing their course, since they were not very confident about their academic performance and capabilities. Most people in this group came from joint education programs, and sought to upgrade their qualifications to a bachelor’s degree. The worry for them was whether they could smoothly graduate from UTAS. The key for their course selection therefore was ease of graduation, and they usually stuck to the same course they studied in China (see section 11.6).

Chinese international students who were keen to change their majors, also attached great weight to ease of graduation for the sake of a successful transfer between majors. One

interviewee attempted to enrol in a course which was in a completely new field, Education. In comparison between the difficulty of a Master of Teaching, and a Master of Education (TESOL), she eventually chose to undertake the latter because “I heard from others that the TESOL course had no exam, and so I only needed to write essays, which was easier than Teaching” (IV2).

The ease of graduation from particular courses also drew special attention of the students who hoped to be promoted in their professions after completing the course. Due to their affiliation with their companies or organisations, the expectation to complete the course in a short time was high for them. Their preference for a course was one which was comparatively easier to complete if there were a few available in their field.

Another aspect related to the ease of graduation was English language competence. Chinese international students focused on not only whether they were able to meet the English language requirements for course admission, but also they judged whether they had sufficient English language competence for passing it. When the students got a clear understanding of the nature of some courses in the areas of Social Sciences and Humanities, and that there is an implicit requirement for a high level of English language competency, they headed straight off to another course with lower English requirements. Some students thought that even if they graduated from courses with high requirements in English they may still not be competent in their related professions. This was mainly due to little confidence in their English language proficiency. A few interviewees indicated the correlation between this point and their university course selection. Two interviewees who chose not to take a major in Teaching explained their reasons. One remarked, “if I taught in a primary school or a high school, first of all, my English would not be good enough. Because of my limited English, I could not teach students (in Australia)” (IV6).

There have been a very small number of studies (Pimpa, 2002; Wu, 2014) exploring the association between the ease of graduation and university course selection. The research finding here is in line with Pimpa’s findings (2002), that the course decision of Thai students was based on language proficiency. However, in contrast to my study, Wu’s research (2014) found that “easy-pass subjects” were not the standard for Chinese international students when selecting a master’s degree course in the U.K.

11.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the motivating factors behind Chinese international students’ decisions on university course. This is the last logical facet of the literature-derived framework for making choices, and these results have been discussed by comparing similarities and differences with extant studies in academia. The following is the six crucial influencing factors, and the eight sub-factors which influence university course selection by Chinese international students. These factors interact with each other and are mutually influential on the course selection process. Chinese international students are impacted by some of these as predominant

factors, or by a number of motivations simultaneously.

- Personal interest
- Immigration prospects
- Course reputation
 - Course reputation
 - Influence from family, friends or education agents
- Future employment prospects
 - Ease of finding a relevant job
 - Job promotion
 - Ideal future career
 - Gaining useful professional knowledge and skills
- Joint education programs

With this elaboration of the underlying factors behind course choice here, along with the discussion from Chapter 6 to Chapter 10, the first research question (what are the factors influencing the choices of Chinese international students in their decision to enrol in a regional Australian university?) for the primary objective of this research (to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university) has been fully addressed.

Chapter 12 Post-Sojourn Satisfaction With the Decision to Study at UTAS

12.1 Introduction

The six previous chapters have outlined a wide range of factors that influenced Chinese international students when making decisions to pursue higher education at UTAS. The next step is to facilitate the inductive generation of the specific decision-making models that lie behind the processes that the students passed through. Prior to the formulation of these models, it is necessary to assess the students' pre-departure decisions for UTAS study and all the relevant factors that they took into account on the way, because sensible decision of UTAS and the right factors pertinent to this decision will be sound foundations for the establishment of decision-making models. Clearly, the best approach to evaluate the decision and relevant factors of Chinese international students is to examine their perceptions of the decision of UTAS as their study destination after experiencing the entire higher education service at UTAS. In this way, student satisfaction with their pre-departure decisions even after completion of their UTAS course is the most valuable way to assess their final perceptions of their experience. At that stage, any tangible outcomes of their UTAS education will have made an impact on their post-sojourn life in areas such as employment, further education, and PR. Recalling these should help the graduates more objectively assess their decision of studying at UTAS in retrospect. Therefore, examining the students' satisfaction with their original pre-departure decisions of UTAS study will be the focus of this chapter.

The investigation into student levels of satisfaction was undertaken in the second round of individual interviews in this research. Chinese international graduates who took part in the first round of interviews were invited to this round as well. 21 of them eventually participated in it. Participation in the second round of interviews ended up occurring at various stages due to difficulties in recruiting potential participants for the second round, as it needed to be undertaken after graduation from UTAS and a long wait for potential participants who had originally delayed their graduation. The timeframe of the interviews is shown in Figure 12.1.

Of all 21 participants in the second round of interviews, the majority (N=14) took part eight months after UTAS graduation. Three participated in the 10th month after completion of university, and the other three were interviewed in the fourth, sixth and ninth month respectively. A Ph.D. candidate conducted his second round of the interview prior to graduation but after his thesis had been submitted. His data was still counted because he was an important representative of higher degree students among the interviewees. Except for this interviewee, each of the other participants had been awarded their UTAS degrees when participating in the second round of interviews.

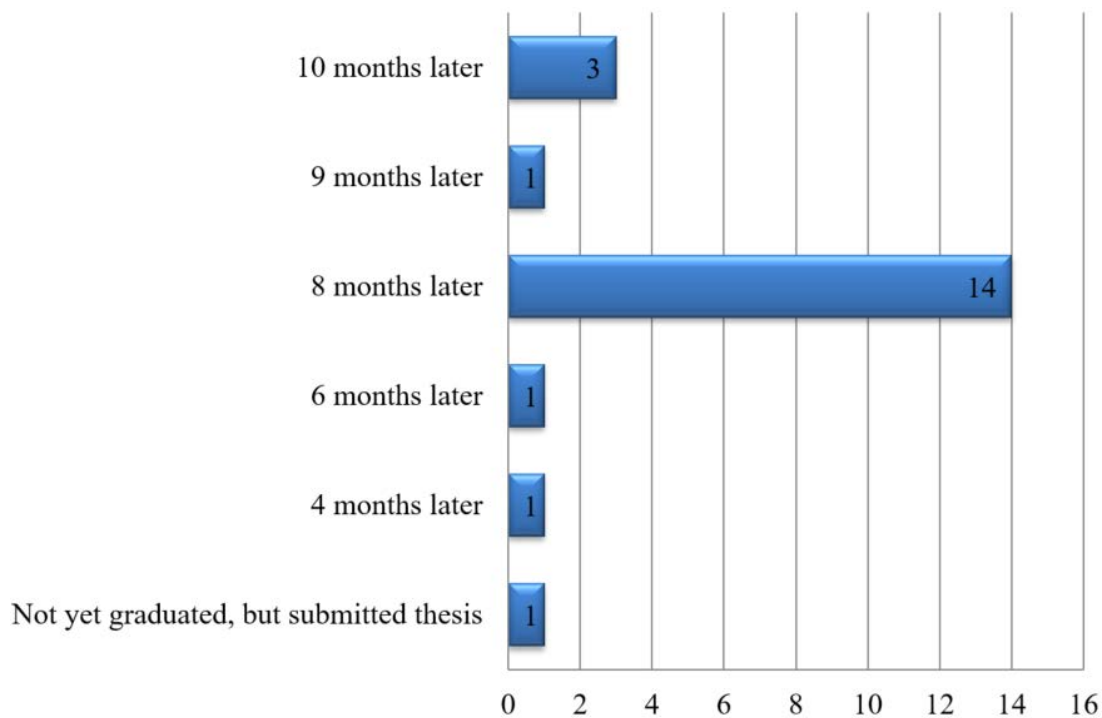


Figure 12.1. Time since graduation from UTAS before the second round of interviews.

The following sections of this chapter present the results of the second round of interviews. It begins with a discussion of some key outcomes of UTAS study for Chinese international graduates, then turns to their levels of satisfaction with their UTAS decision.

12.2 UTAS Study Outcomes

This section will report on the graduates' employment, education and PR outcomes after UTAS degree completion. It will provide comparatively objective facts about the graduates' overseas study outcomes, before examining their stated satisfaction levels.

12.2.1 What Are You Doing Now? Where Are You?

12.2.1.1 Distribution of work and further education

Participants were asked "what are you doing now?" in the interviews. As Figure 12.2 shows, the majority (N=13) of them were involved in work, and eight were participating in further study, and others were three. Among the group of "others", one had accepted a job offer and was going to start work in the following month; another had received a master's degree offer from UTAS and was about to enrol; the final individual however, had reported being unemployed and was still seeking employment.

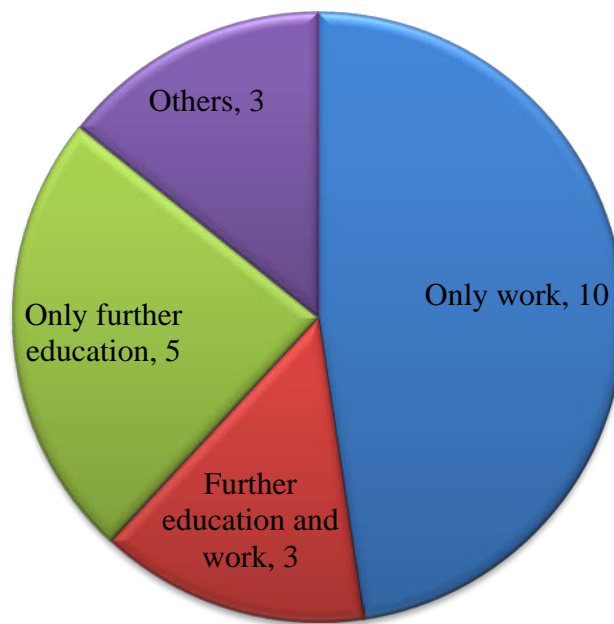


Figure 12.2. Distribution of interviewees in work and further education.

The literature has revealed that it normally takes some time for university graduates to transit into the employment sector (Australian Universities International Directors Forum (AUIDF), 2017; Coates & Edwards, 2009). The majority of Chinese international graduates in this research however had successfully found employment within a short period (four to 10 months) after their UTAS education. In other words, their transition from study to work was more rapid and smoother than expected. Similarly, the other interviewees who were participating in further learning had a seamless connection from one program to another. It is therefore understandable that the unemployed interviewee was still looking for work due to the short time that had passed since graduation.

12.2.1.2 Countries and areas

Participants in the second round of interviews were also asked “where are you?”. Figure 12.3 demonstrates that the majority (N=13) of the graduates had remained in Australia following graduation from UTAS. In terms of locations in Australia for those people, seven were still in Tasmania, three had relocated to Melbourne, and three had moved to other areas, including Adelaide, Brisbane, and Mudgee in New South Wales.

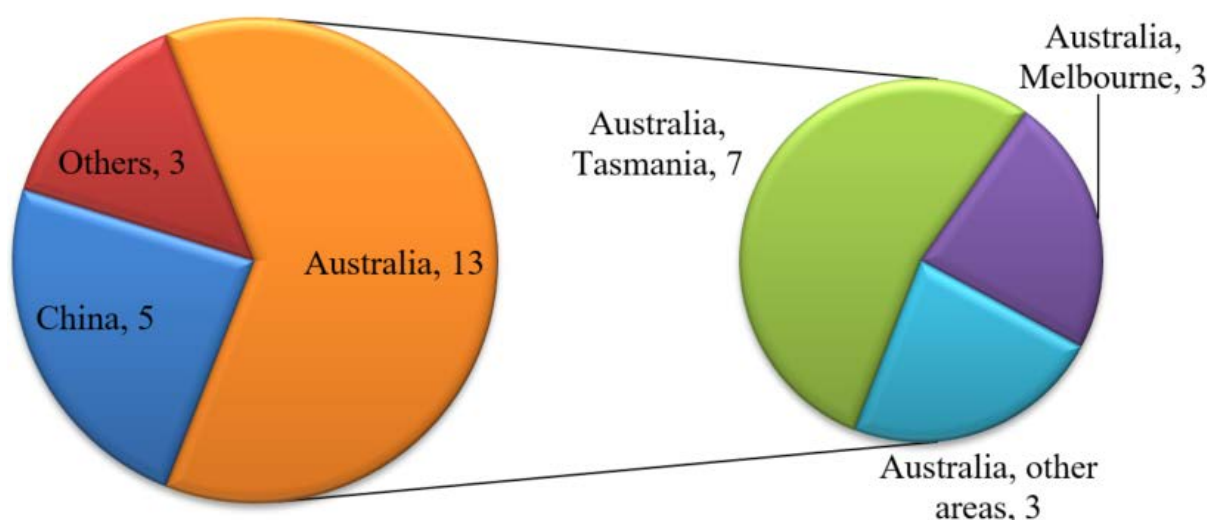


Figure 12.3. Countries and areas that the graduates located in.

This has two possible implications. The first is that there are more job opportunities in big cities than in Tasmania, and therefore Chinese international students had relocated to metropolises. The other possibility is that even an experience of higher education in regional Australia was not able to alter the students' strong desire to move to a big Australian city after graduation.

Compared to the majority who remained in Australia, the number of interviewees who had returned to China was much smaller (N=5). This research found that Chinese international graduates were more likely to stay in Australia beyond completion of their UTAS courses. Four of the five who had returned to China were working rather than continuing further education, while one was unemployed. In addition, three other graduates had moved to third countries, including Myanmar, Singapore, and Canada, all for work.

12.2.1.3 Career paths

The employment outcomes seen in Table 12.1 revealed that among the 13 interviewees with a job, 11 were in full-time employment, one was in part-time work in Australia, and one was doing a casual job in Australia. It is noticeable that the two in part-time or casual employment were undertaking Professional Year Programs.¹ In other words, their time was dominated by study requirements rather than work. This also indicates a successful and smooth study-to-work transition.

Table 12.1

¹ A Professional Year Program is a 12-month "structured professional development program combining formal learning and workplace experience for international students who have graduated from a university in Australia" (Studies in Australia, 2017).

Work Types

Work type	N
Full-time	11
Part-time	1
Casual	1

Figure 12.4 shows that nearly half of the employed interviewees (N=6) reported Australia as their country of work. Among them, two were working in Tasmania, two in Melbourne, and the other two in other areas of Australia. Four of these six were in full-time employment, respectively located in Melbourne, Hobart, Brisbane, and Mudgee. Four graduates had returned to China for work, and of those four, three had returned to their hometowns for a job.

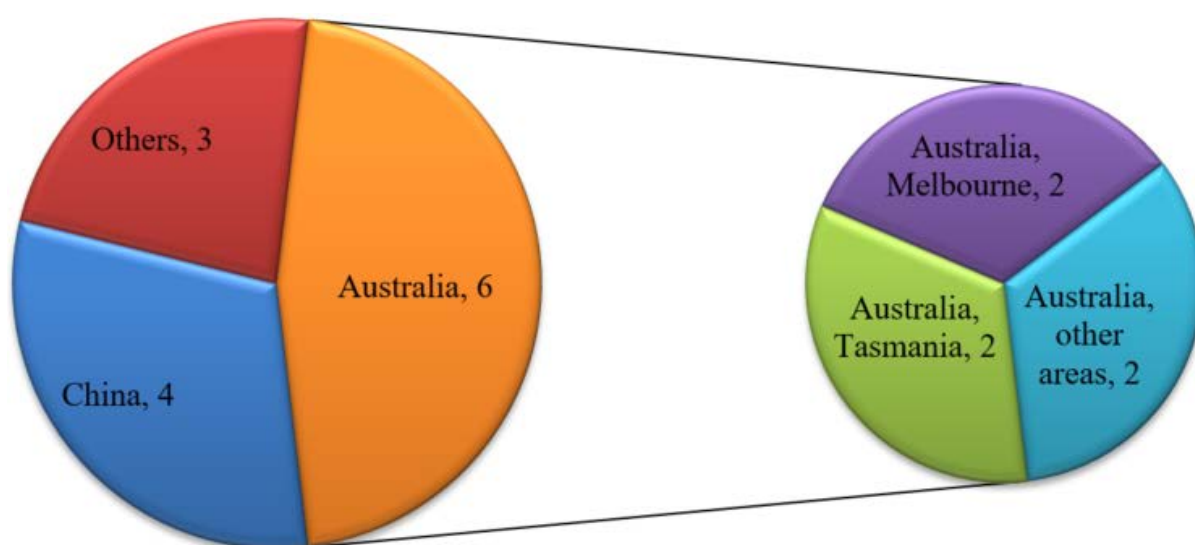


Figure 12.4. Countries and locations where the graduates were employed.

Interviewees who were in employment were also asked when they had started their current job. Shown in Table 12.2, only two interviewees had already found a job before graduation from UTAS. Those two in fact had already secured their jobs before even arriving in Australia. All except those two found a job after graduation from UTAS.

Table 12.2

Time of Job Commencement

Did you get this job before graduating from UTAS?	N
Yes	2
No	11
Did you get this job before starting study at UTAS?	N
Yes	2

Interviewees were also asked to reflect upon the place that their UTAS qualification took within their job-hunting experience. Most participants stated that employers treated the same level of Australian qualifications as the same, across all education institutions. They stated however that work experience and capacities played a more crucial role than qualification and institution of graduation in their job-hunting process.

12.2.1.4 Further education and training

Besides the employed cohort, the second largest cohort in the second round of interviews was graduates who were engaging in further education and training (N=8). Intriguingly, all interviewees undertaking further education had stayed in Australia (see Table 12.3).

Table 12.3

Location of Further Education

Further education locations	N
Australia	8
Others	0

There were essentially two reasons stated, to obtain a higher degree, and to acquire Australian PR. Table 12.4 shows that five of the eight students remained behind to obtain Australian PR, so their further study centred on Professional Year programs, and PR points-related certificates. For them, further education could only be undertaken in Australia. The other three were involved in PGR study. Among them, two remained at UTAS while one was studying in a metropolitan Australian university.

Table 12.4

Further Education Purposes

Further education purposes	N
For higher degree	3
For Australian PR	5

12.2.2 Is This What You Wanted to Be Doing?

The idea of whether the graduates are satisfied or not is seen to come from whether their educational expectations were met or not. As such, in the second round of interviews, participants were asked whether what they were doing was actually what they had wanted to be doing following the completion of their degree at UTAS.

As Figure 12.5 shows, Chinese international graduates were broadly satisfied with their current work or study. Of the 21 interviewees, the majority (N=18) indicated answers of “yes, this is what I wanted to be doing” (N=11) or “yes, this is sort of what I wanted to be doing” (N=7). From the view of satisfactory employment and educational outcomes, this implies that the graduates were happy with their decision to study at UTAS.

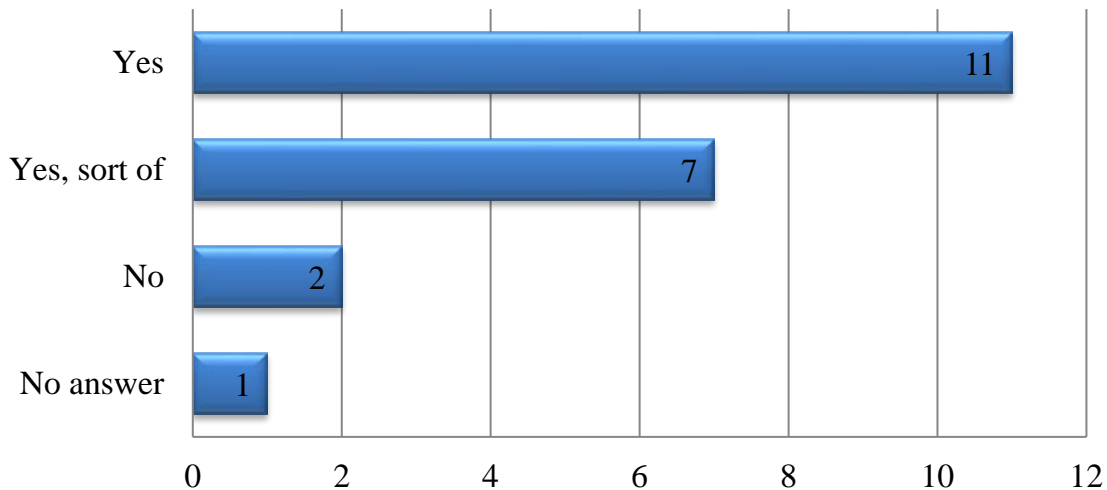


Figure 12.5. Is this what you wanted to be doing?

12.2.3 Is What You Are Doing Relevant to Your Course at UTAS?

As a further exploration of their UTAS course learning outcomes, the graduates were asked their perceptions about the relevance of their UTAS degree for their current work and study. The majority (N=17) reported that their course was relevant and useful to their work and further education, covering areas such as their professional knowledge and employability skills (see Figure 12.6). Interviewees also commented in the following way, “what I learnt at UTAS was cases, which is useful, but the application into practice needs to be flexible” (IV17).

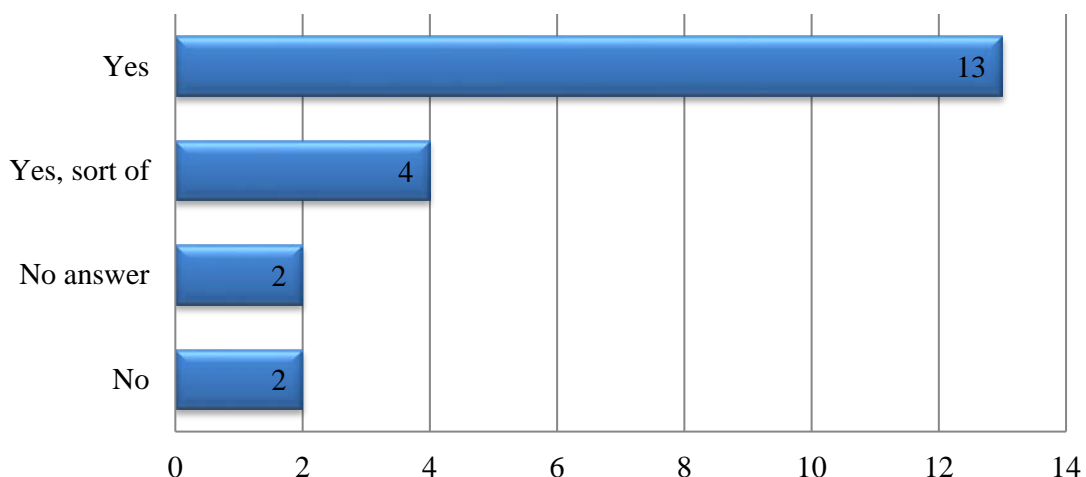


Figure 12.6. Is what you are doing relevant to your course at UTAS?

Besides the students who had gone on to work, those who continued studying also noted the relevance of their previous UTAS study. For example, one interviewee who is a Ph.D.

candidate, commented in the following way, “my current Ph.D. research topic builds upon my UTAS honours’ topic” (IV13). There was no obvious difference in perception between the students who had graduated from professional courses and those from non-professional courses. Both groups saw a high level of relevance in their UTAS degree with their later work or study.

12.2.4 Have You Obtained Australian PR?

The potential outcome of Australian PR was also identified as a dominant factor in student decisions for higher education at a regional Australian university (see Chapter 7 to Chapter 11). At the beginning of the second round of interviews therefore, participants were asked whether they had obtained Australian PR. Figure 12.7 reports that even in the early stages (four to 10 months) after graduation from UTAS, five interviewees had already had their dream come true and gained Australian PR. Among the other interviewees, some were very close to receive it. Three of them had already applied. Four had situations conducive to receiving it, and they planned to apply for it in the near future. The other nine graduates did not express any intention to apply for PR.

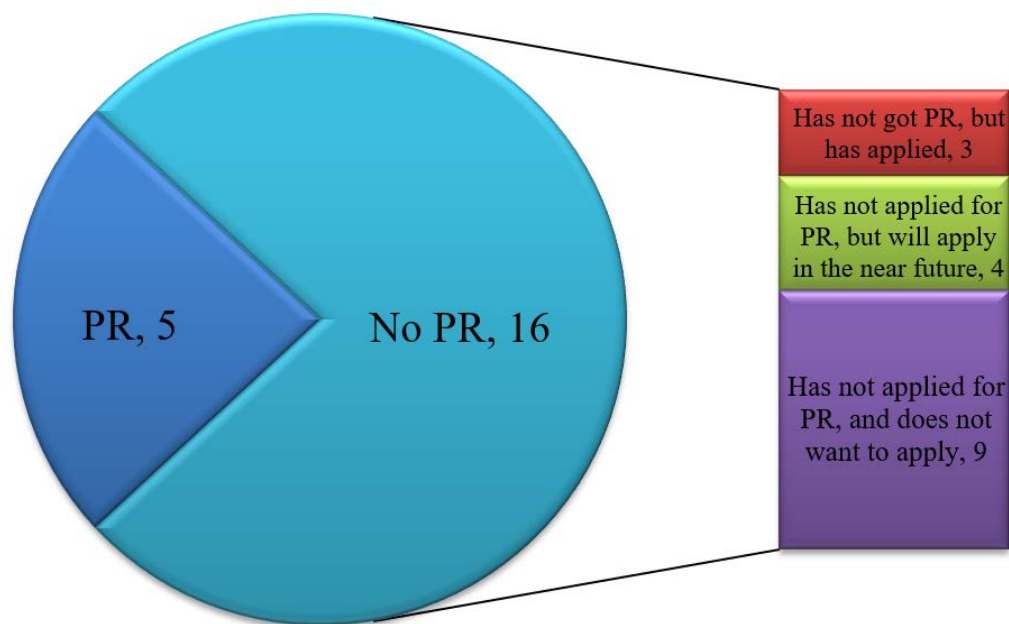


Figure 12.7. Have you obtained Australian PR?

12.3 Post-UTAS Satisfaction With the Decision for UTAS Education

This section aims to examine student levels of post-UTAS satisfaction by comparing their original decision for overseas study with final outcomes. It does that by exploring two primary aspects of the decision, that is, when the students looked back whether they believed they considered the right factors when deciding to pursue higher education in regional Australia, and whether they believed that they had made a sensible decision in choosing UTAS.

12.3.1 How Worthwhile Was It to Be Educated at UTAS, A Regional Australian University?

The level of student satisfaction about their UTAS study experience can be discovered by comparing their original expectations and aspirations towards overseas study with evaluations of what they really experienced during their study. Therefore, the question of how worthwhile it was to be educated at UTAS, a regional Australian university was asked in the second round of interviews.

Remarkably, interviewees consistently indicated a high level of satisfaction with their decision to study at UTAS. Figure 12.8 shows the details of this. The dominant attitude of interviewees was that choosing UTAS was worthwhile, or even very worthwhile. This accounted for more than 85% (N=18) of all interviewees in the second round. In other words, the majority of Chinese international graduates in the study believed that they had made a sensible decision in choosing to study at UTAS, a regional Australian university. What is more, virtually every interviewee answered this question without hesitation, which means that they were quite sure about the high value of their decision.

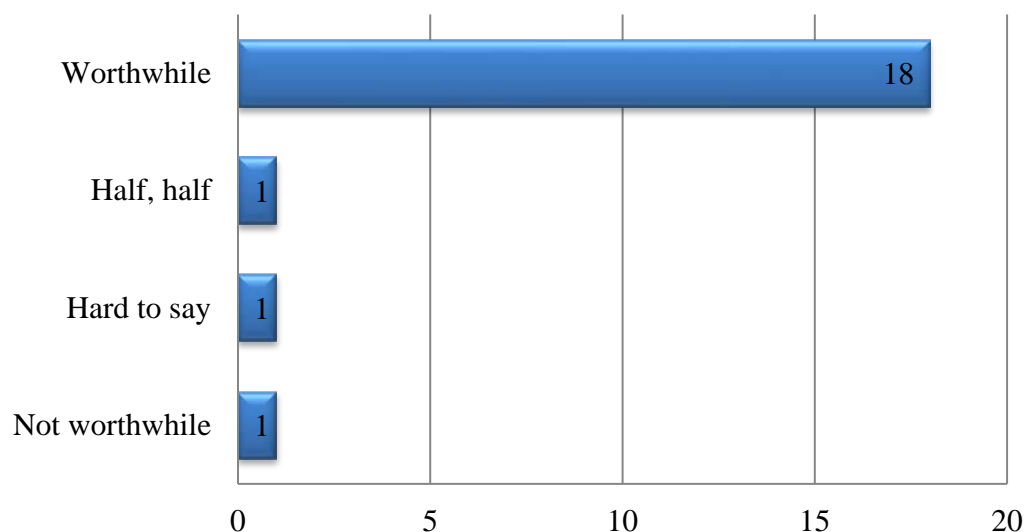


Figure 12.8. How worthwhile was it to be educated at UTAS, a regional Australian university?

Furthermore, interviewees also interpreted underlying reasons behind their perceptions. Table 12.5 lists the key perceived factors identified by them. Intriguingly, the majority of interviewees reviewed and repeated their key pre-departure expectations which had been reflected in the first round of interviews (see Chapters 6–11). That is, their original expectations of overseas study were so fundamental as to not have changed at all over time. In fact, those very expectations were still being used as criteria for assessing whether their original decision had been sound or not.

Table 12.5

Worthwhileness of Being Educated at UTAS, A Regional Australian University

Higher Education	Overseas	Australia	Tasmania	UTAS	Course
(1) Future employment prospects (2) Gaining knowledge and skills (3) Broadening horizons (4) Qualifications	(1) Gaining international (intercultural) experience (2) Future employment prospects	(1) Environmental considerations ① Socio-cultural environment	(1) A conducive study environment ① A unique environment for English language learning ② A good environment for general study (2) Good living conditions ① Low expenses ② A welcoming community (3) Natural environment (4) Regional immigration advantages	(1) Higher quality-cost ratio ① More competitive tuition fees ② Availability of scholarships ③ University reputation	(1) Course reputation ① Course reputation (2) Future employment prospects ① Ideal future career ② Gaining useful professional knowledge and skills

From Table 12.5, we can see that the interviewees focused more on the benefits that their choice for Tasmania, UTAS and their particular course had brought them, than the benefits from their choice to pursue higher education, or study overseas, or even to study in Australia. This is probably because the factors of Tasmania, UTAS and their course had a more direct influence on their satisfaction than the other three choices. However, the importance of choices for higher education, to study overseas and not in China, and for Australia in particular, was no less important than the choices for Tasmania, UTAS and their course, since their broad and detailed choices reveal that the Chinese international graduates took into account factors influenced by the three important orientations of qualifications, career and immigration.

12.3.2 To What Extent Were the Expectations You Had Before Coming to UTAS Met?

In the last question, most Chinese international graduates responded positively about their experience of UTAS, and perceived that their pre-UTAS expectations had been fulfilled. A further exploration of their post-UTAS satisfaction was sought out in the second round of interviews by positing the following question to them, “to what extent were the expectations you had before coming to UTAS met?”.

The positive attitude seen in response to the last question continued, and Chinese international graduates revealed that most expectations that they had when deciding to study at UTAS were fulfilled in their UTAS study experience (see Figure 12.9). To be specific, seven interviewees responded very positively, saying that 100% of their expectations were met. The average rating for fulfilled expectations among the rest of interviewees fell between 60%-100%. This reinforces the fact that the Chinese international students felt that they had made a good decision to study at UTAS.

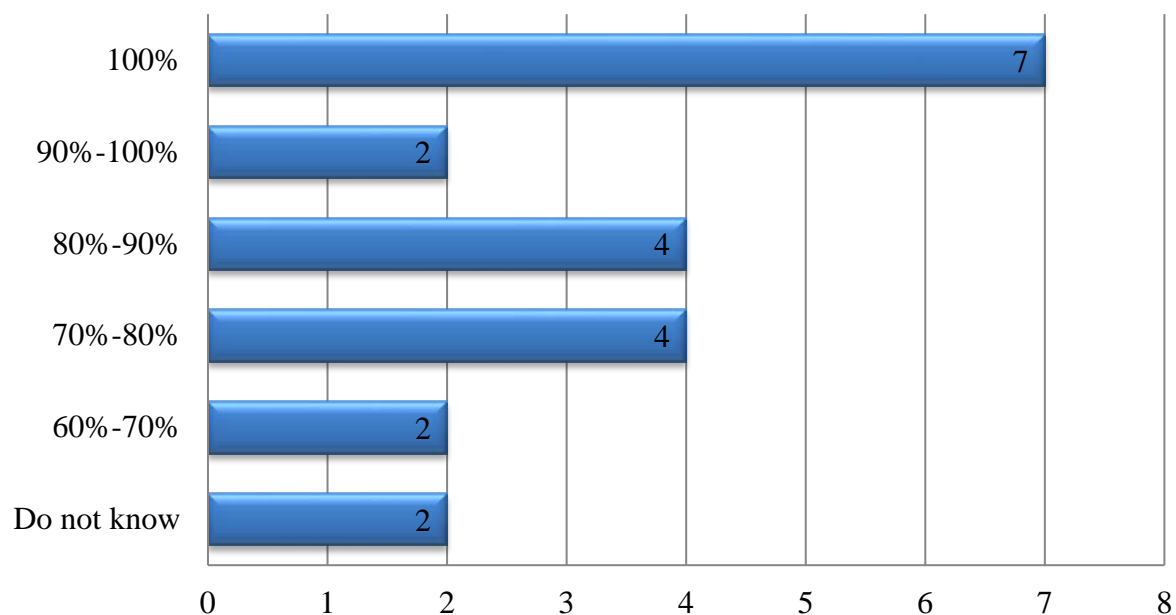


Figure 12.9. To what extent were the expectations you had before coming to UTAS met?

Furthermore, the graduates were asked to comment specifically upon which expectations were fulfilled and which ones were not (see Table 12.6). Interviewees reported some expectations mentioned for the last question (how worthwhile it was to be educated at UTAS, a regional Australian university), but also presented additional expectations that had been met. Table 12.6 is a further development of Table 12.5. Both explore post-UTAS satisfaction, and interviewee answers to this question cover all factors listed in Table 12.5. Seen in Table 12.6, all factors not in bold type are in Table 12.5, while bold and italicised expectations are new, based on answers to this question.

Table 12.6 embodies the majority of expectations identified in Chapter 6 to Chapter 11, except for motivations for six choices which had been attractions before they came to UTAS but which did not influence their UTAS experience. Unlike Table 12.5, the distribution of expectations among the six choices in Table 12.6 was more even. That is, in such a short period (four to 10 months) after Chinese international students had completed their degree at UTAS, not only their expectations related to their UTAS study experience were fulfilled, particularly in their choices for Tasmania, UTAS and their course, but they also had experienced fulfilment of long-term expectations and aspirations under the broader choices of higher education, overseas study, and study in Australia.

It can be derived from Table 12.6 that the orientation roles of qualifications, career and immigration that occur among the Chinese international graduates' original expectations have become even more apparent than those in Table 12.5. This reinforces the fact that qualifications, career and immigration were the three major orientations that Chinese international students have when making decisions to study overseas.

Other than the fulfillment of their original expectations, interviewees also noted which particular expectations were not fulfilled. Intriguingly, most of these were mentioned by interviewees who rated that 100% of their expectations were met. In other words, these were not their pre-departure expectations but they were new expectations that had been generated during their UTAS experience. Although there were other original expectations not met and reported by participants in the interviews, the importance to present any violation of expectations could be negligible, since only very few interviewees mentioned them.

In this way, it has been verified that the majority of Chinese international students believed that they had taken the right factors into account when choosing to pursue higher education at a regional Australian university.

Table 12.6

Fulfilled Expectations of Studying at UTAS, A Regional Australian University

Higher Education	Overseas	Australia	Tasmania	UTAS	Course
(1) Future employment prospects	(1) Improving English language ability	(1) An English-speaking country	(1) A conducive study environment ① A unique environment for English language learning	(1) Higher quality-cost ratio ① More competitive tuition fees ② Availability of scholarships ③ University reputation	(1) Immigration prospects (2) Course reputation ① Course reputation
(2) Gaining knowledge and skills	(2) Gaining international (intercultural) experience	(2) Accessibility of country ① A future immigration opportunity	② A good environment for general study		(3) Future employment prospects ① Easy to find a relevant job
(3) Broadening horizons	(3) Learning to be independent	(3) Environmental considerations ① Socio-cultural environment	(2) Good living conditions ① Low expenses ② A welcoming community	(2) Flexible study pathways ① Ease of graduation	② Ideal future career ③ Gaining useful professional knowledge and skills
(4) Self-actualisation				(3) Immigration prospects	(4) Ease of courses ① Ease of graduation
(5) Qualifications	(4) Future employment prospects (5) A future immigration opportunity		(3) Natural environment (4) Regional immigration advantages		

12.3.3 Do You Think That You Made the Right Choices (Six Choices)?

The last two sections have verified that Chinese international students believe that they had made a sensible overall decision to engage in higher education at UTAS, according to their own expectations which were generally well met. According to the literature-derived framework for making choices of this research (see Figure 3.2), we know that the decision to study at UTAS entailed six choices (the choice for higher education, to study overseas, to come to Australia, to come particularly to Tasmania, to enrol at UTAS, and to enrol in the course of their choice). In order to explore the sensibility of Chinese international students' decision of engaging in higher education at UTAS more thoroughly and seek evidence from diverse angles, this section seeks to examine whether the students believe that they made the right choices (six choices) when deciding to study at UTAS.

In the second round of interviews, participants consistently showed a positive attitude towards the choices that they had made. As seen in Figure 12.10, 19 of the 21 interviewees noted that all six choices they made were right for them. While they did not provide underlying reasons for their evaluations, their answers were clear, unhesitant, and unconditional, which strongly suggests that they firmly believed that their choices had been the right ones. Only two interviewees had different opinions, but both of them still believed that their other choices, like higher education, overseas study, and their course selection were solid. Generally speaking, Chinese international students felt like they had made the right choices in selecting UTAS according to their own evaluations. Furthermore, it also reinforces the statement that the UTAS decision Chinese international students made was good.

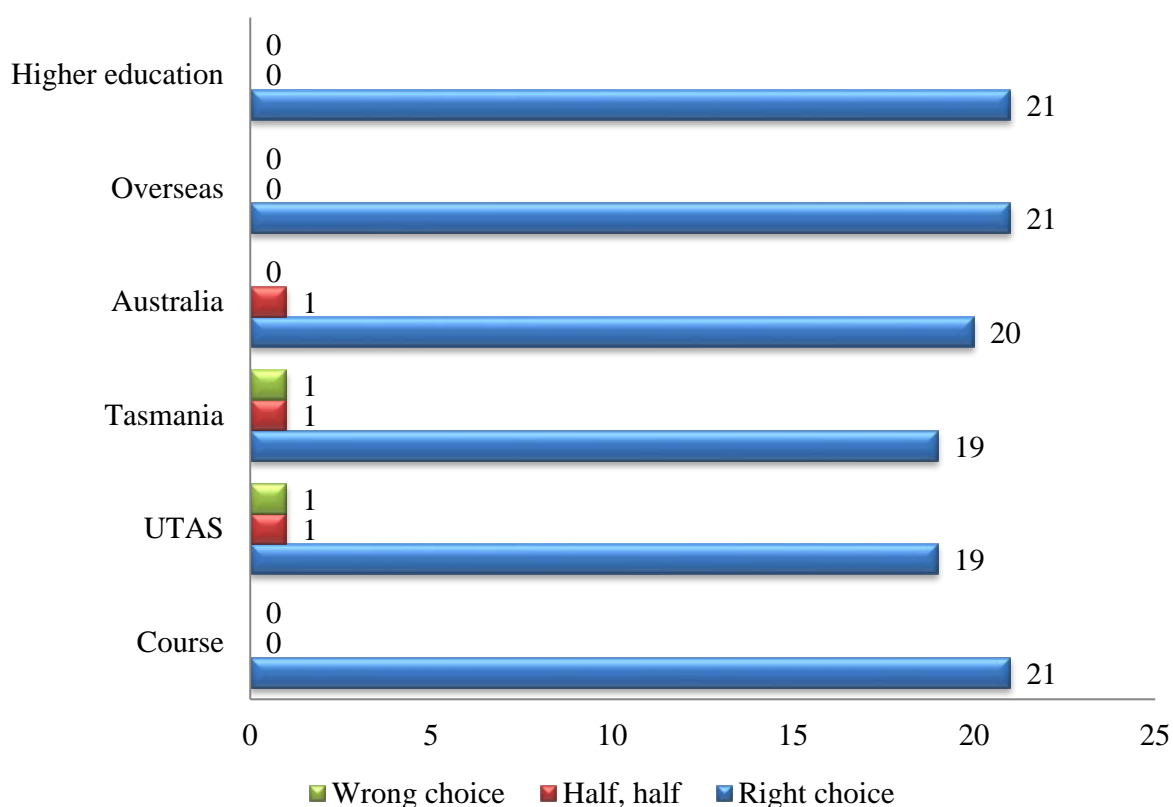


Figure 12.10. Do you think that you made the right choices (six choices)?

12.4 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the post-sojourn satisfaction of Chinese international students with the decision to pursue education at UTAS, four to 10 months after graduation. It was based on the results of data collected from the second round of individual interviews and has made a comprehensive assessment of student decisions to study at UTAS, as well as identifying relevant original factors which motivated them to pick UTAS as their study destination.

The chapter first discussed the outcomes of UTAS study for the Chinese international graduates in three areas: employment, education and PR status. It found that the vast majority of Chinese international graduates had successful outcomes following graduation, including involvement in employment, participation in further education, and obtainment of Australian PR in such a short period after completion of their UTAS degree.

For the graduates in employment, most had full-time work. All interviewees with further study remained in Australia, primarily for the purpose of obtaining Australian PR. The majority of the graduates showed that they were happy with what they were doing, and their employment or further learning was closely related to their UTAS course, and they showed a strong desire to apply for Australian PR. On the basis of the above findings it is possible to infer that the Chinese international students definitely believed that they had made the right decisions to pursue higher education at UTAS.

The chapter then turned to explore the graduates' post-sojourn perceptions of their decision of UTAS study and relevant influencing factors. The majority of the Chinese international graduates clearly stated that receiving higher education at UTAS was worthwhile for them, and that most of their original expectations towards UTAS were fulfilled. This was then reinforced by data from the six individual choices that were under the overall decision to engage in higher education at UTAS, where students also were also satisfied with their decision.

This chapter also assessed the factors that the students took into account when deciding to enrol at UTAS. In the second round of interviews, the Chinese international graduates assessed these factors by identifying things that directly fulfilled their original expectations, or by evaluating the level of fulfilment of their original expectations. The vast majority of original factors were eventually met, and therefore the conclusion can be made that the Chinese international students did take the right factors into account when making their decisions to study at UTAS.

These results will now be the foundation for creating decision-making models in the next chapter. The three major longer term orientations which affected the decisions of the students: qualifications, career and immigration will be used as a foundation to build the decision-making models, and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Due to the time constraints of this Ph.D. project, the satisfaction levels of students towards their decision to study at UTAS only at four to 10 months after degree completion could be investigated. According to findings of other relevant research (e.g. Coates & Edwards, 2009), employment engagement and salary levels among university graduates usually grows substantially over the first five years after degree completion, and thus levels of satisfaction of the Chinese international graduates with their degree could well increase over time. The current findings of this research were already highly positive towards their UTAS decision, so it is highly likely that their satisfaction levels will be even more enhanced, and they will increasingly believe that they made a sensible decision to study at UTAS, based upon the right factors. Thus, the findings from this research are worth acceptance.

This chapter has clearly answered the research question (did Chinese international students evaluate their decision to study at a regional Australian university as worthwhile after graduation from this university?) coming from the second research objective (to identify how Chinese international students perceive their experiences of a regional Australian university after their overseas study sojourn).

Chapter 13 Decision-Making Models of the Chinese International Students in the Case Study

13.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to develop a number of decision-making models for the Chinese international students in the case study. International student decision-making models in this research have been defined in Chapter 3. In the case study, the models refer to the dynamic interaction and relationship of international students' decisions around the six main choices that needed to be made for them to choose to study at UTAS, as well as incorporating the underlying factors and processes that were involved in these. Modelling the decision making of the Chinese international students will provide crucial insights that better capture the overall decision making of this cohort, and will help stakeholders and researchers clearly understand, engage with and embrace the features of their individual decision making.

The theoretical basis of Chinese international students' decision-making models in this case study was the proposed literature-derived framework for making choices (see Figure 3.2). The framework presents six key choices included in the decision making of the students and their logical order, from the broadest sphere (the biggest ring on the top) to the narrowest aspect (the smallest ring on the bottom). All of these were necessary for the students to end up studying at UTAS in Tasmania. This chapter attempts to ascertain whether the sequence of these six choices in students' decision making was identical with the one in this literature-derived framework for making choices, and what the influencing factors behind those decision-making processes were.

It has been discovered from the theory-building perspective of the previous chapter that the final decision that Chinese international students made to pursue higher education at UTAS was judged by them as sensible and well-considered. The three pivotal components in their decision-making models were identified as choices, factors and processes (see Figure 3.1). To be part of the literature-derived framework for making choices of this study, six major and distinct decision-making choices of Chinese international students have been discovered. To further assess those choices in the last chapter, it was evident that all of those six choices were right choices to decide to study at UTAS. Factors influencing each choice were fully and concretely interpreted in the six aforementioned results and discussion chapters. Also, the last chapter has clarified that Chinese international students took the right factors into consideration when making the decision of UTAS study. Unlike these two components, choices and influencing factors, which have been elaborated on in this thesis, another key element, decision-making processes need to be explored, for the sake of the construction of complete Chinese international students' decision-making models. Therefore, in the following sections, the decision-making processes will be initially unveiled. Decision-making processes and decision-making models are largely derived from interview data. After that, with the integration of all three essential components, some decision-making models will be formulated.

In the decision-making model section, the underlying interaction mechanism within those models will be elaborated upon for the purpose of systematically and comprehensively interpreting them.

13.2 Choice-Strength Framework

A choice-strength framework has been constructed here in an effort to explicitly identify and classify the decision-making processes of the students. The rationale behind it is from the data analysis. In the analysis of choice sequences and influencing factors that interviewees reported, this research found a correlation between the choice sequence and the choices strength in the decision-making processes. More specifically, the sequential position of a choice in the decision-making process reflected its choice strength. In other words, the choice sequence is decided by its choice strength. Interviewees clarified that they made the more important choices first, and the importance of the former choices were always greater than the latter ones. This finding was in accordance with the statement of Duan (1997) about the interaction between choice order and choice importance in the decision-making processes of Chinese students from Hong Kong and Malaysia who were studying at three South Australian universities. It is at odds however with Pimpa (2002)'s observation that there was no correlation between the chronological choice order and choice importance for Thai student choosing Australian higher education. According to this rationale, a choice-strength framework was formulated and utilised to represent the strength of the six choices in the process of decision making and so as to reflect their sequential order.

The structure of the choice-strength framework was generated from the literature-derived framework for making choices of this research (see Figure 3.2). After data collection, it was found that the sequential order of those six choices in the actual decision making of the Chinese international students was inconsistent with their logical hierarchy in the framework. Therefore, it is necessary to unveil the sequence of those six choices in their decision making. In this way the quantitative data and qualitative data consistently revealed six dimensions in the decision making of the international students, but they held different strength of motivations for each dimension ranging from "very important" to "very unimportant". Therefore, a choice-strength framework will be employed to reflect the differentiated strength of choices in the sequence of those six dimensions.

Seen in Figure 13.1, the choice-strength framework encompasses a set of six choice aspects for the decisions of the international students. Each represents one spectrum from a higher to a lower motivational pole. The six spectra are respectively given the choice labels, that is, higher education, overseas, Australia, Tasmania, UTAS, and the particular course choice made by the student. The positive side of each spectrum is labelled "very important", while "very unimportant" is on the negative side of the spectra. Individual international students shifted the rider on each spectrum to reflect the strength of each choice in their minds, based on the motivations behind their decisions. The final position of each rider located on the spectra represented the strength of that choice.

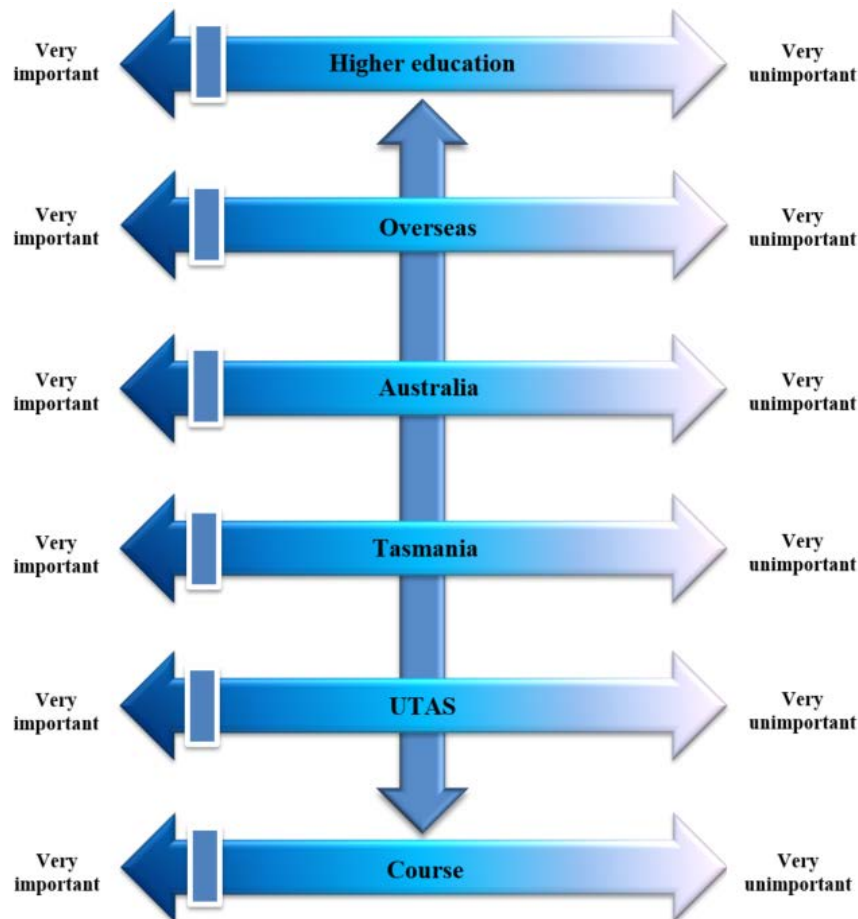


Figure 13.1. The choice-strength framework for Chinese international students making decisions about UTAS higher education.

A higher position on a spectrum means that the international student felt so sufficiently motivated that he or she adopted a positive perception towards that choice, and therefore the choice was arranged in the front position of the decision-making process. By contrast, less motivations might lead a student to position the choice on the lower important side of the pole so that the choice was put further back in the decision-making process.

Also, there is a special case where international students might consider the strength of two choices as the same when making a decision to study overseas, and hence those two choices were positioned the same on the spectra. Eventually, a set of six choice spectra with all six rider positions will be utilised to represent sequences of choices and to reflect the decision-making processes of the international students.

Additionally, it was evident from the qualitative data that these six choices did not stand independently in the decision-making processes of the students. Instead, mutual influences or interactions occurred among choices, which are shown by a vertical double-headed arrow among the spectra in the choice-strength framework. Specifically, one choice might limit another choice based on a student's circumstances. In addition, if one choice was rated as the most important, other choices might show the less strength in making the decision. Dynamic

interactions among choices, in other words, the meaning of the vertical double-headed arrow in each decision-making model will be in further discussions in the next section about decision-making models.

The choice-strength framework therefore visualises the decision-making processes of the Chinese international students. It contributes to theorising their decision-making processes around overseas study, and reveals an underlying dynamic interaction mechanism which occurred in their decision-making processes. Ultimately, it facilitates the development of a number of decision-making models for the students. The application of the choice-strength framework so as to interpret data and characterise decision-making processes and decision-making models will be elaborated upon in the next section.

13.3 Decision-Making Models of the Chinese International Students in the Case Study

The three types of components (choices, factors and processes) can form a great range of decision-making combinations, and therefore unsurprisingly, this research study found that interviewees could not be modelled together on one decision-making model, in other words, no one model size can map out all of the decision choices. That is, decision-making patterns varied across the Chinese international students.

On comparing and contrasting their decision-making behaviours, it was also discovered that there are some commonalities across interviewees where there was a strong motivational orientation throughout the decision making towards a regional Australian university, and that this orientation directly led them into their final decision. But the motivational orientation was diverse and yet occurred across all of the Chinese international students in this research.

Through grouping motivational orientations for the students, three functional decision-making models of Chinese international students' UTAS study emerged. Each has been labelled according to its motivational orientation. Shown in Figure 13.2, the three models were the qualification-oriented decision-making model, the career-oriented decision-making model, and the immigration-oriented decision-making model. These three decision-making models are equally important in this research for describing the decision-making behaviour of the Chinese international students.

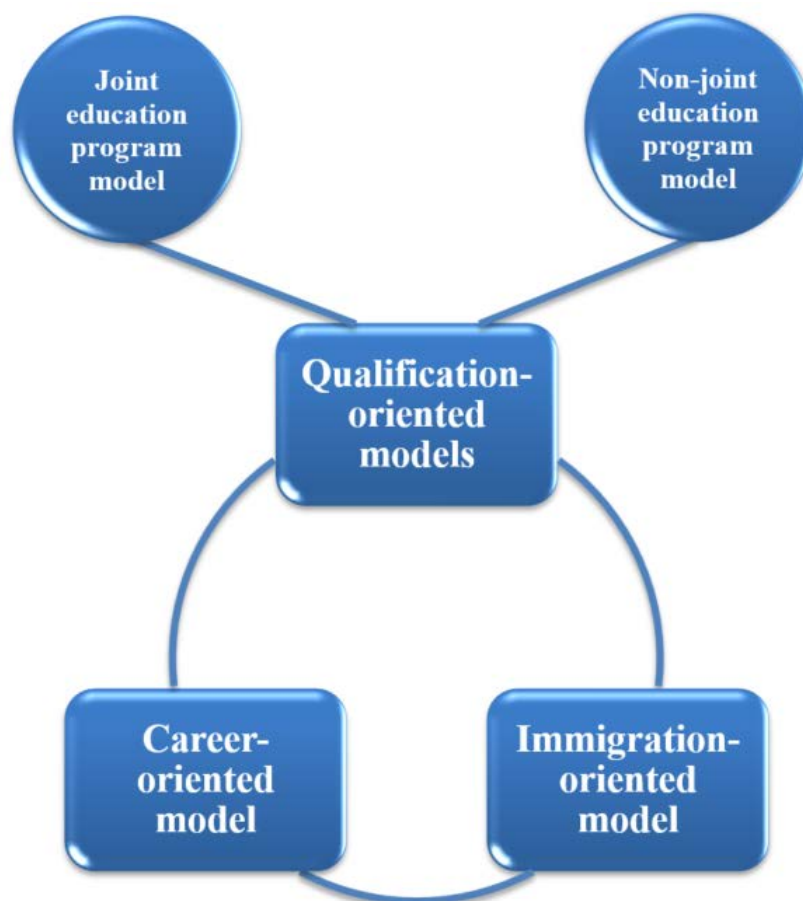


Figure 13.2. The relationship between the decision-making models of the Chinese international students in the case study.

In the qualification-oriented model, the Chinese international students were influenced by their family or CHC, and valued education highly, so that gaining a university qualification was the dominant motivation for them in choosing to study at UTAS. Seen in Figure 13.2, there were two qualification-oriented decision-making models, the joint education program decision-making model, and the non-joint education program decision-making model. It is evident that there were some restrictions on the decision-making processes of the Chinese international students in joint education programs, and therefore their decision-making model was different from those who were not in that kind of joint education program.

The career-oriented decision-making model was another important one, because future employment is one of the most significant determinants behind Chinese international students undertaking higher education. The third decision-making model was the immigration-oriented one. Some Chinese international students had a strong desire to immigrate to Australia, and this aided in their decision to study at UTAS. This type of the decision-making model is represented as well.

The remainder of this section will attempt to elaborate upon these decision-making models. In each section, the choice-strength framework will be adopted to interpret data from the first

round of investigations, and this will be used to visually represent the differentiated strength of the six choices in each one. The decision-making processes will then be discussed in detail and analysed. Sequentially, a concrete decision-making model come under the lens through systematically and holistically integrating the identified decision-making process with dominant influencing factors in order to reveal the dynamic interaction mechanisms among the choices, factors, and process. Finally, one interviewee case which was representative of each model will be elaborated upon.

13.3.1 Model One: The Qualification-Oriented Decision-Making Models

13.3.1.1 The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs)

The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs) was a model derived from the Chinese international students who were in joint education programs at UTAS, and who were mainly guided by a motivation to receive an academic qualification when deciding to study at UTAS. The students in these programs at UTAS had made a decision to enrol in a joint education program at a Chinese university after completing high school. After a few years of study, they then made a final decision to transfer to UTAS. Staying in the Chinese university to complete the rest of this course was also available to them, but they chose instead to come to Australia.

In their pre-decision stage, the reason why they chose to enrol in a joint education program rather than a non-joint education course was because they placed a higher priority on the name of the university, rather than the course that they had chosen. Joint education programs in Chinese universities usually have lower scores of the National College Entrance Examination for entry than non-joint education programs, even in the same university, and those universities happened to be the best ranking universities for the students to be enrolled in on the basis of their scores.

Interviewees indicated that if they had gained better scores, they would have been more likely to enrol in a non-joint education program in a higher ranking Chinese university. In other words, they chose the joint education program by default rather than by direct preference. When it came to the joint education program itself, the Chinese international students cared more about the value of the qualification of the Chinese partner university than the UTAS element of it.

Instead of exploring the pre-decision here however, the following qualification-oriented decision-making process, model and representative case (for joint education programs) will be based only on the final decision of the students.

(1) The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs)

This qualification-oriented decision-making process (for joint education programs) was derived after a process of data analysis illustrated in Figure 13.3. These six choices were weighted differently by the Chinese international students in the process of their decision

making, and was based on meaningful distinctions concerning their strength. Their main motivational orientation throughout the decision-making process however was their future qualification.

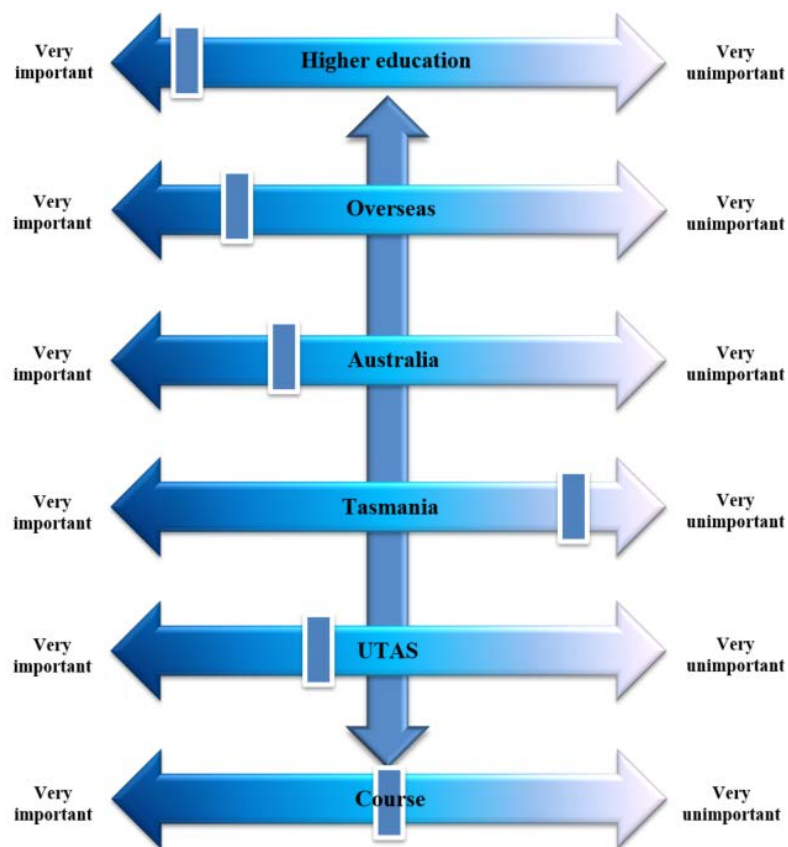


Figure 13.3. The qualification-oriented decision-making process of the Chinese international students (for joint education programs) in the case study.

According to the strength of each of their choices, the students were faced with six choice sets at five stages in their qualification-oriented decision-making process (for joint education programs) when selecting to study at UTAS, a regional Australian university (see Figure 13.3). This process mainly followed the sequential order of choices shown in the literature-derived framework for making choices of this research, except for one choice which was in a different position. Namely, they chose higher education first; overseas second; then travelled to a foreign country, Australia. Sequentially, they chose UTAS, and the fact that it was in Tasmania was a secondary issue for them, which they did not think important. They then finally selected their particular course at UTAS.

The theories behind the decision-making models encompasses the three key components of choices, factors, and process. To integrate and assemble those three elements in concert, the qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs) was formulated (see Figure 13.4). The core of this decision-making model is a clear flowchart of decision-making process through the six choices (derived from Figure 13.3). The other part of the

decision-making model consists of the main factors influencing the choices, which are presented next to the relevant choices.

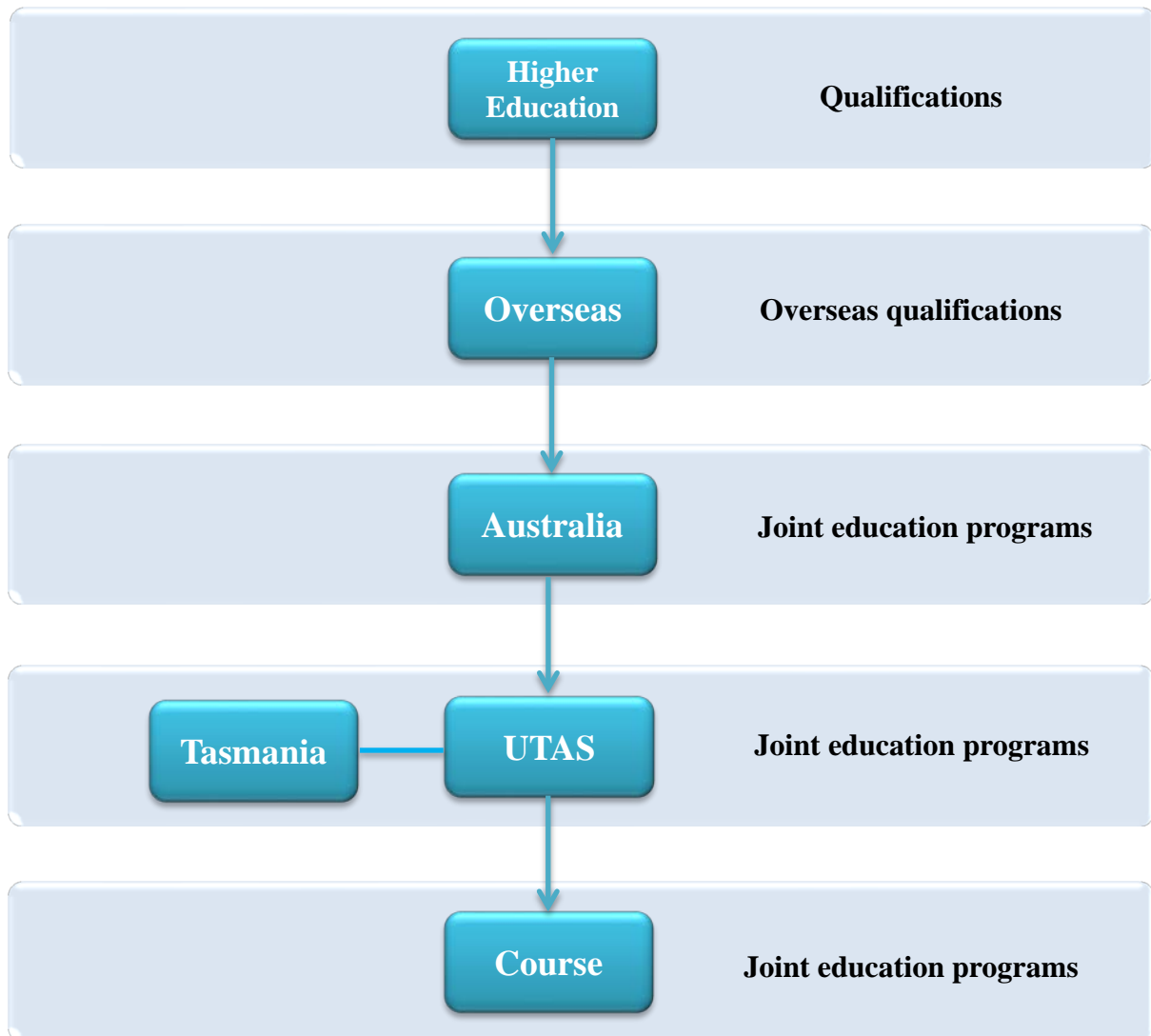


Figure 13.4. The qualification-oriented decision-making model of the Chinese international students (for joint education programs) in the case study.

This decision-making model contains a cause-effect chain. The six choices were causally related, and influenced by relevant factors. That is, each choice could cause or impact the others regarding order of strength. In the model, the choice of higher education could be viewed as a starting point for the decision-making process in this model. The primary orientation for this group of Chinese international students was their final qualification, and therefore interviewees chose to continue their higher education as their most important choice. As the first choice in the decision-making process, it was the real goal that the students had in their minds when making the five other choices.

The choice to study overseas was rated by them also as second in the decision-making chain.

Interviewees particularly pointed out that they were eager to get an overseas university qualification alongside their Chinese higher education credential, so they chose to go abroad to study rather than simply completed their course in China.

It may be assumed that students would initially select an overseas institution that they would like to study at, however students stated explicitly that they only decided on UTAS due to the constraints of the course agreement between UTAS and their sending Chinese academic institution. In fact, they reflected that after they made the choice to study overseas, they also took into consideration other foreign countries. Their preference was actually to enrol in a better world ranking overseas university, especially in the U.S.A, which are widely known as the top universities in the world. They ultimately selected to proceed to higher education in Australia, which was their third most important choice due to the ease of enrolling in UTAS, and relevant benefits, such as saving time and money compared to restarting their courses in another country.

In this way, the choice to study at UTAS was the next logical choice for them, since interviewees reported that they had only applied to one university, UTAS, because of the cooperation between it and their Chinese university. All interviewees belonging to this model mentioned that they had not insisted on the particular choice of region in Australia, because it was simply limited to UTAS. UTAS is in Tasmania, so they came to Tasmania. They would go wherever UTAS was. Thus, the choice of Tasmania was a secondary choice to that of UTAS. For this reason, we can see that the sequence of the choice of UTAS and the choice of Tasmania together in Figure 13.4.

This last step in the decision-making model was completed when the final choice for university course had been made. Their choice was limited to courses in a certain UTAS school or faculty due to the need to transfer their credits to that university, based on the agreement of the joint education programs they were enrolled in.

(2) Case: Interviewee 21

Interviewee 21 was from a “3+2” joint education program run by a Chinese university and UTAS. She started her interview by discussing the joint education program she was enrolled in. After spending three years in her Chinese university, she planned to transfer to UTAS to complete her fourth year, and earn her bachelor’s degree. The fourth year for her degree was also the first year of a master’s degree at UTAS. One year would be enough for her to gain a master’s degree at UTAS. Thus, she expected to get two bachelor’s degrees from the Chinese university and UTAS respectively, as well as one UTAS master’s degree, the main reason for her to continue her program at UTAS.

Like many other high school leavers in China, instead of making the decision for higher education by themselves, her parents acted as gatekeepers, and decided upon the Chinese university she was in as well as the joint education program for her. This was primarily due to the influence of traditional CHC. However, when she reached the stage of transferring to UTAS

to continue her study, the decision to study at UTAS had become more of a consensual agreement between her parents and herself, maybe because of her increasing age.

She noted that her choice to pursue higher education was the most important priority in her decision-making process to continue at UTAS, because the qualification itself was very important for her. Friends in her circle were all academically outstanding, and she was from a key Chinese high school, so this atmosphere of positive peer pressure had driven her to follow higher education and continue studying. She also stated being deeply influenced by the traditional CHC, compliance, and that her dream since childhood was to gain a university qualification.

After choosing to continue onto higher education, she decided to study overseas rather than completing her course at her Chinese university, on the grounds that she was found the idea of earning two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree much more appealing. Also, she did not intend to complete the bachelor's degree course in China and only after that enrol in a postgraduate course in her university due to the comparatively lower ranking of her Chinese university compared to overseas institutions.

The third choice in her decision-making process was to come to Australia. Instead of immediately choosing that option, she first considered the U.S.A., because she believed that international rankings of American universities were much better than those of Australia. Here, once again, her high priority on the value of a university qualification was evident. The convenience of the joint education program she enrolled in however became the main reason that she gave up on the thought of studying in the U.S.A., and considered Australia. This would also save her time, since she did not need to invest extra time in preparing for the GRE or the TOEFL English language tests for admission to graduate schools in America.

After choosing Australia, this student then focused on the choice of UTAS. She admitted that she initially took higher ranking Australian universities into consideration, but eventually the limitations of the cooperation between her Chinese university and UTAS resulted in her choosing UTAS rather than any other Australian university. Her familiarity with UTAS was also a key factor in her choice. She pointed out that UTAS lecturers had come to her Chinese university to conduct classes, and she was already using the online learning platform of MyLO employed by UTAS in China. She admitted however that she did not know where Tasmania was, and that she had only focused on the institution rather than its location when making her decisions. For her, the choice of Tasmania was integrally attached to the choice of UTAS.

The last stage of her decision making was about her course. She was allowed to choose a major from among three, [major 1], [major 2] and [major 3] at UTAS, which were relevant to her course in China. Her interest was in [major 3] and also with respect to Chinese air pollution, studying [major 3] could well offer her bright future employment prospects. The two other majors had drawbacks for her. Therefore, she chose [major 3]. Within this major, she ultimately picked her course, [master's course 1] rather than [master's course 2] when considering the more useful knowledge she could gain from that course.

13.3.1.2 The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs)

The other group of Chinese international students who enrolled in non-joint education programs at UTAS also had strong motivational orientation towards qualifications. Unlike students in joint education programs however, their decisions had less limitations made by their education programs. As a consequence of some differences between them, it is necessary to provide another decision-making model, qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs) as follows.

(1) The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs)

A qualification-oriented decision-making process (for non-joint education programs) was revealed through an analysis of comments provided by interviewees in non-joint education programs who attached great importance to gaining a particular qualification. Unlike the Chinese international students in the joint education program decision-making model who were strongly drawn to gaining an overseas qualification besides the Chinese one, students in the non-joint education programs model were only motivated to study at UTAS for a university degree and the associated intangible value of it. Although the sequential order of most of the six choices in this decision-making process were identical among all levels of the Chinese international students, there was a minor difference in the level of the strength of two particular choices between the undergraduates and the postgraduates, which will be discussed in the next paragraph. This finding corroborates the ideas of Pimpa (2002).

Taking account of this as well as the different strength in the weight of other choices, the qualification-oriented decision-making process (for non-joint education programs) could be presented as follows (see Figure 13.5 and Figure 13.6). This cohort weighted the choice to undertake higher education as the most important one, followed then by their choice to travel overseas for study. The choice then for Australia, as well as the choice of their particular course could be converted depending on the proposed study level. To be specific, for bachelor's degree seekers, Australia was selected as the third most important choice, and this was then followed by their choice of course (as in Figure 13.5). For higher degree seekers however, the choice of a particular course came before the choice of destination country (see Figure 13.6). This difference undoubtedly stems from their educational backgrounds. Being keen to get a master's degree or a doctor's degree, most postgraduates did not desire to change their field of study for their higher degree, and hence they stuck to their field of study and made other choices around that. Undergraduates however usually went to rank the country choice higher than the course choice. After that, the choice for UTAS was their fifth most important one, and the decision-making process ended with their choice of region.

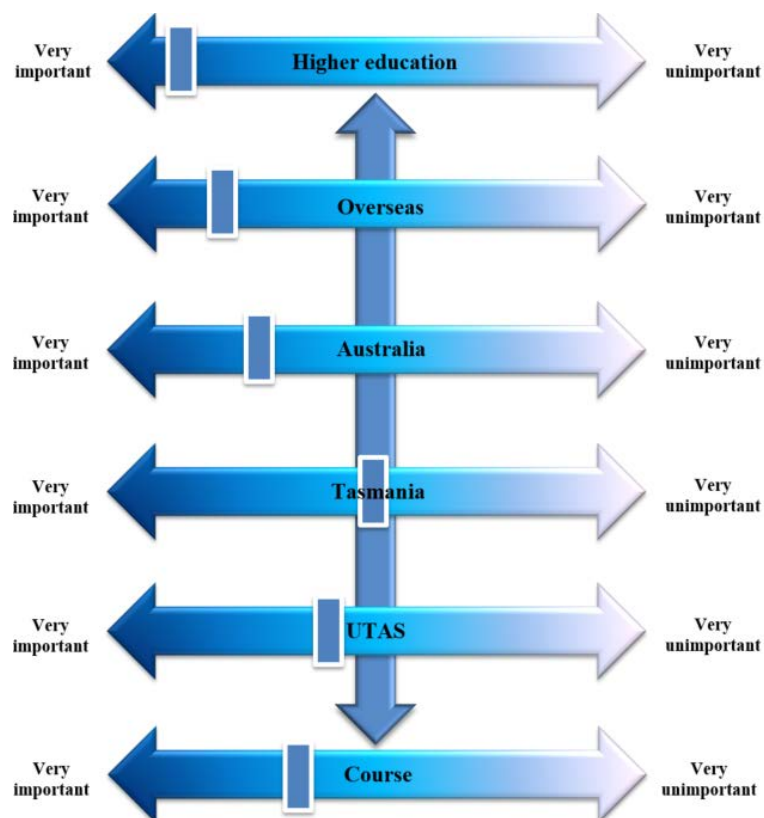


Figure 13.5. The qualification-oriented decision-making process of the Chinese bachelor's degree seekers (for non-joint education programs) in the case study.

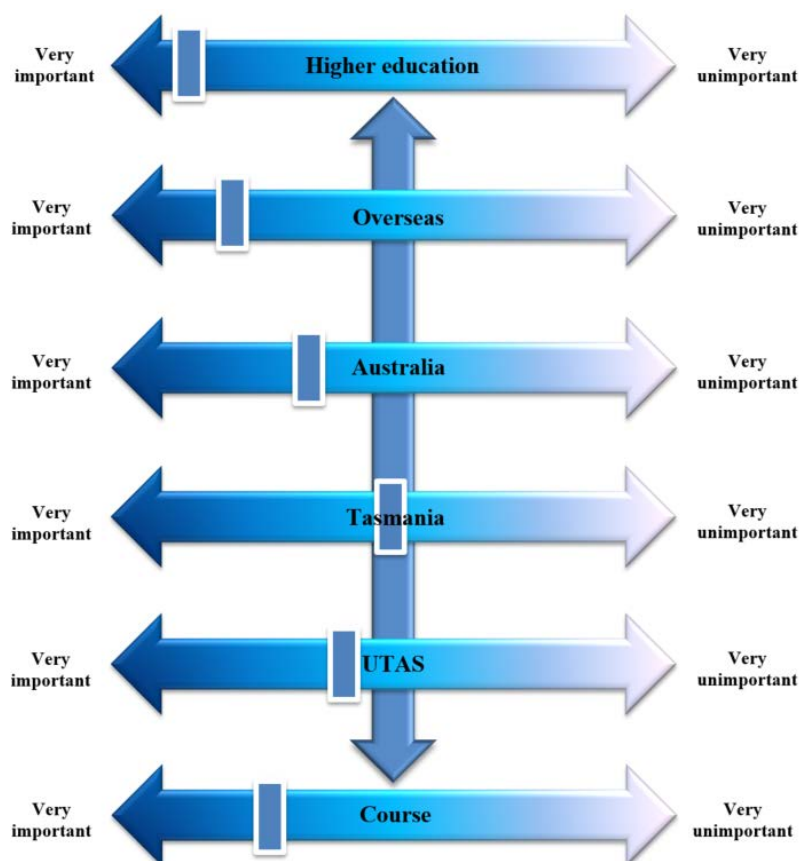


Figure 13.6. The qualification-oriented decision-making process of the Chinese higher degree seekers (for non-joint education programs) in the case study.

To combine the decision-making process with these six factors, as well as all of the influencing factors discussed in the last chapter, the following qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs) has been constructed (see Figure 13.7).

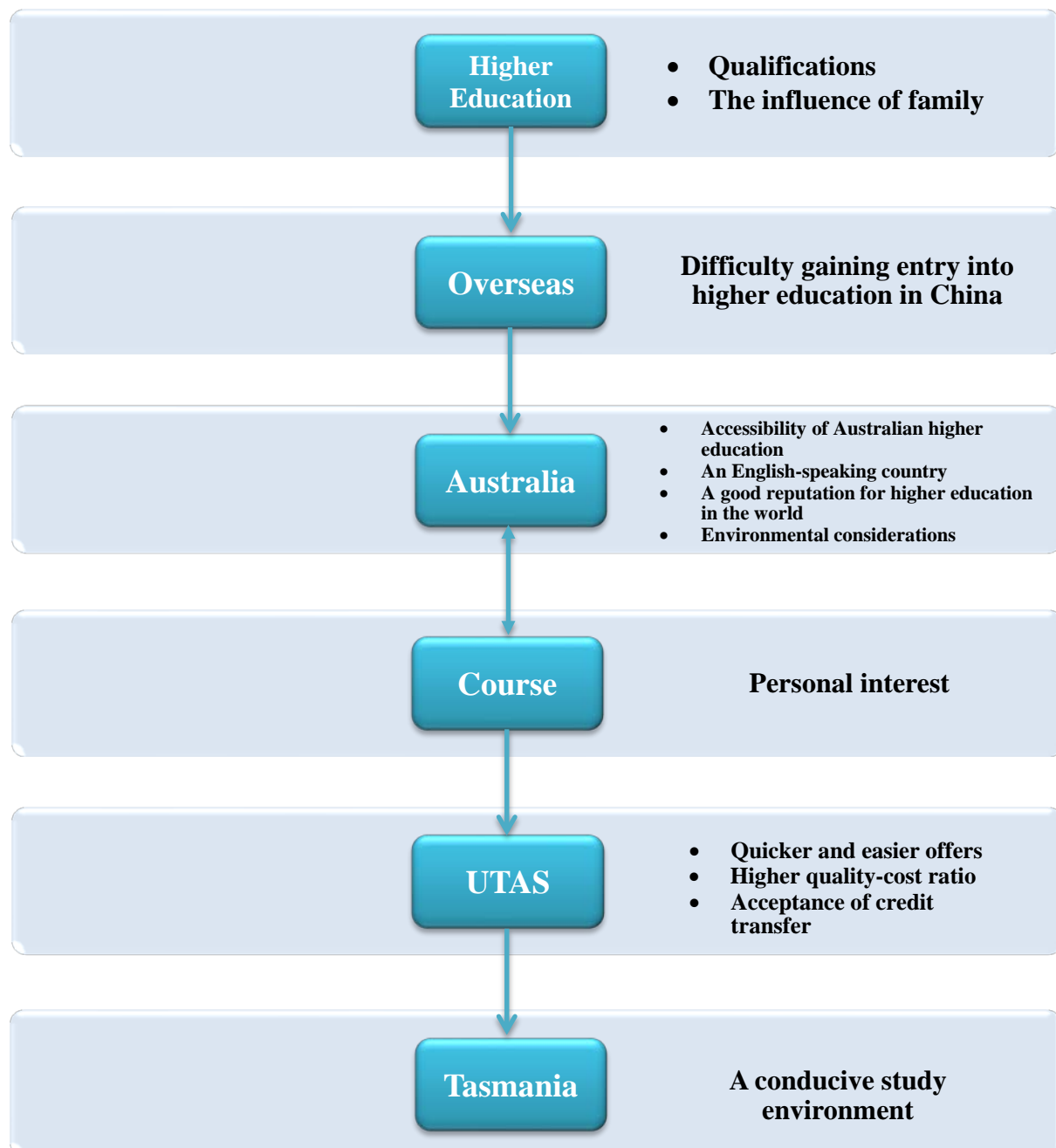


Figure 13.7. The qualification-oriented decision-making model of the Chinese international students (for non-joint education programs) in the case study.

This decision-making model started with the students' choice to pursue higher education instead of seeking employment. Most people in this cohort held a diploma or a bachelor's degree, but they had a strong aspiration to upgrade to a higher level of qualification. This motivation to pursue further education was also greatly influenced by their family. Intriguingly, the majority of those Chinese international students were from elite families. Their family members, particularly their parents were very well-educated, and also had successful careers. The interviews showed that they were quite proud of their families, and at the same time their family had high expectations towards them. So as to keep abreast of their family's expectations, they needed to continue on to a higher qualification level. Gaining a degree thus became the final goal for them. Interviews also revealed that the opinion of such parents were highly influential over their children, so for a great number of the Chinese international students in this model the choice for higher education was actually their parents' decision.

The second choice in the decision-making chain was to study overseas rather than in their own country. This was mainly due to difficulty gaining entry into higher education in China. Some of them had been underachievers, so they were not able to gain university entry in China. Thus, they had no choice but to look overseas opportunities for a higher education. Likewise, other students in this model desired to gain a degree in a top-ranking Chinese university, but they could not do so because of harsh competition there. They therefore chose to study abroad, which provided them with more choices for high-ranking international universities.

For undergraduates, after deciding to go overseas, the choice of destination country was often made by parents. Parents expected their children to be outstanding in their education, so they helped them choose a country which would be a good environment for them to study in. This could be for a wide range of reasons such as accessibility of higher education there, it being an English-speaking country, it having a good educational reputation in the world, and also due to physical environmental considerations of that country. Those undergraduates then went on to choose a course based on their personal interest.

For postgraduates, their third choice in the decision-making process was the course, still in their original study field. They then selected their destination country. They expected a smooth access to Australian higher education due to their failure in the entrance exams to gain entry into Chinese higher degree course but this kind of exams was not required for Australian universities.

The fifth position in the model was university choice. Most Chinese international students in this model applied to a few different Australian universities, especially good ranking ones. They were extremely keen to receive a university offer, so making several applications was seen to enhance their success rate. Enrolling into a top-ranking university was also their dream. Eventually, UTAS was chosen because of the quicker and easier offer they received, compared to responses from other Australian universities. Other factors such as the higher quality-cost ratio came into play. Some Chinese international students however only applied to UTAS, due to the fact that it accepts credit transfer from their previous studies.

The choice of Tasmania was usually made after all other five choices. Most interviewees in this model indicated that they did not know Tasmania well when they made their application to UTAS, but after they received an offer they began to research about it, and discovered that the regional environment of Tasmania could benefit their English learning and general study. This led them to accept their UTAS offer.

(2) Case: Interviewee 8

As a typical representative of the “rich X generation” in China, interviewee eight was the only child in an elite and wealthy family. His grandfather was a former mayor of a Chinese city. His parents were very well-educated and run their own successful business in separate fields. Similar to the situation of most of the rich X generation in China, his parents were so busy with their businesses that his grandparents took care of him. Although very well off, he had very poor academic performance. His parents therefore believed that it was impossible for him to gain entry into a Chinese higher education institution, and so made the decision for him to transfer from Chinese high school to a college in Tasmania so that he would have an opportunity to continue onto higher education in Australia in the future. After completing his college course, he studied at Tasmanian TAFE, and after gaining an Advanced Diploma there he decided to enrol in a bachelor’s course at UTAS.

The starting point of his decision-making process was to pursue higher education. He believed that gaining that was the most important choice for him, and he repeatedly emphasised that the purpose of attending UTAS was to get a degree. This determination to get a university degree was rooted in pressure from his family. Most of his family members had a higher degree or had graduated from top Chinese universities, so they valued university degrees highly. As he said, “my family will not accept me without a university degree.” Also, he discussed about how his parents were the authority figures in his family, so he had to listen to them and obey rather than challenge their decisions, especially about that kind of life-changing decisions. On the other hand, he had turned family pressure into his own positive belief that receiving higher education was not only his parents’ will but also his own dream since he was little.

The second choice in his decision-making process was to go overseas for study. As mentioned, the only choice for him was to study abroad in order to gain further qualifications, because it would be very difficult for him to gain entry into a Chinese higher education institution being such an underachiever in that system. This was not only the belief of his parents but also one he himself held. An Advanced Diploma from TAFE offered him a pathway into Australian higher education system, and Chinese universities do not accept credit transfer from TAFE.

The initial reasons for his mother to choose Australia as a study destination for him included safety when compared to the U.S.A. Also, Australia does not have a bad reputation for higher education, and it is an English-speaking country, which can improve the opportunities for international students like him to master English. After a few years study in Australia, these factors did actually benefit him, and he was able to go on to achieve a university education. Most importantly, his Australian diploma had provided him entry into higher education.

The fourth choice for him concerned his course (rather than the particular university he would study at), because he prioritised what he would like to learn over where he would like to study. This choice was made by himself, and received support from his parents. He thus continued his TAFE major at UTAS.

After that he made his fifth choice, this time to enrol in UTAS. He stated that he had desired to attend UTAS for quite a while. His academic performance at a Tasmanian college did not initially meet the entry requirements for UTAS, so he had to first study in TAFE instead. The only university he applied to was UTAS however, because it accepted credits from TAFE and the quick offer from UTAS also encouraged him. In other words, his choice for UTAS was a sensible one considering the potential time he would save.

This student finished his decision-making process by being accepted at UTAS, in regional Australia. Before allowing him to continue studying here however his parents came to Tasmania to see it for themselves. The Tasmanian environment appealed to them, since it seemed conducive to study for them, unlike big cities. They chose it as their son's study destination since they thought the small Chinese population in Tasmania could benefit his English learning, and the quietness and the beauty of Tasmania would be good for "purifying his mind". He was also told by his parents at that time that he could move to another region to study after college if he wanted. However, when he compared it with his friends' life in larger Australian metropolises, he decided to stay in Tasmania, agreeing with his parents that the environment was favourable for study.

13.3.2 Model Two: The Career-Oriented Decision-Making Model

Decision making guided by a preferred future career choice was another important model. The higher education outcome of employment is always a key goal behind Chinese international students deciding to enrol at university, and due to this it was necessary to build the career-oriented decision-making model.

Chinese international students can be divided into two categories in terms of work experience, people who had never had formal employment, and people who were employed or had a profession before applying to UTAS. For those who were working, the intention to attend university was to obtain a job promotion in the same career field, or alternatively to transit to a new career area. For students who had never had a formal job, the majority were qualification holders who had run into a wall when seeking decent employment. They therefore made the decision to gain more qualifications and gain better future employment prospects in the same career field.

Intriguingly in this research, interviewees who were seeking job promotion were all enrolled in specialist courses at UTAS, and most students who were looking for transition to another career, or who never had been formally employed before were in non-specialist courses. Specialist courses by definition restrict future career choices to within those fields, while

Chinese international students in non-specialist courses have more choices in more countries and a wider range of universities that they can choose from. Surprisingly however, it was found here that the decision-making process of the Chinese international students in specialist courses and non-specialist courses were identical. Through further analysis of those two cohorts, it came up that factors influencing choices in those two groups were similar as well. Thus, one career-oriented decision-making model can be employed for both groups of Chinese international students.

13.3.2.1 The career-oriented decision-making model

The career-oriented decision-making model maps out the decision-making process of the Chinese international students who intended to enrol in specialist and non-specialist UTAS courses were motivated by the final goal of a career in those fields. It was shaped by analysing interview conversations and incorporating relevant survey data (see Figure 13.8). The students initially ranked their decision to pursue higher education as the highest and most important choice for them. The particular course they enrolled in was rated as the second most important, followed by their choice to study overseas. They indicated that choosing to study in Australia was the fourth most important choice they made, and finally, that the particular university (UTAS) was selected by them as their last choice, sequentially speaking. They did not consider the study region, Tasmania, because it was determined by default through their decision to enrol at UTAS.

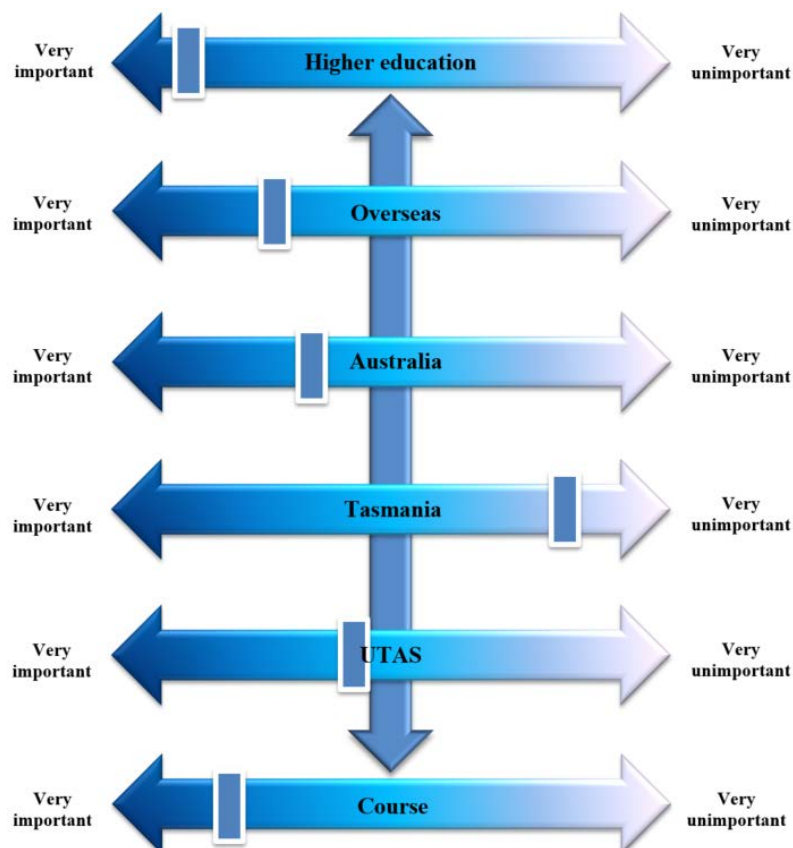


Figure 13.8. The career-oriented decision-making process of the Chinese international students in the case study.

The integration of this identified decision-making process, and confirmed influencing factors as well as six choices leads to the formulation of career-oriented decision-making model (see Figure 13.9).

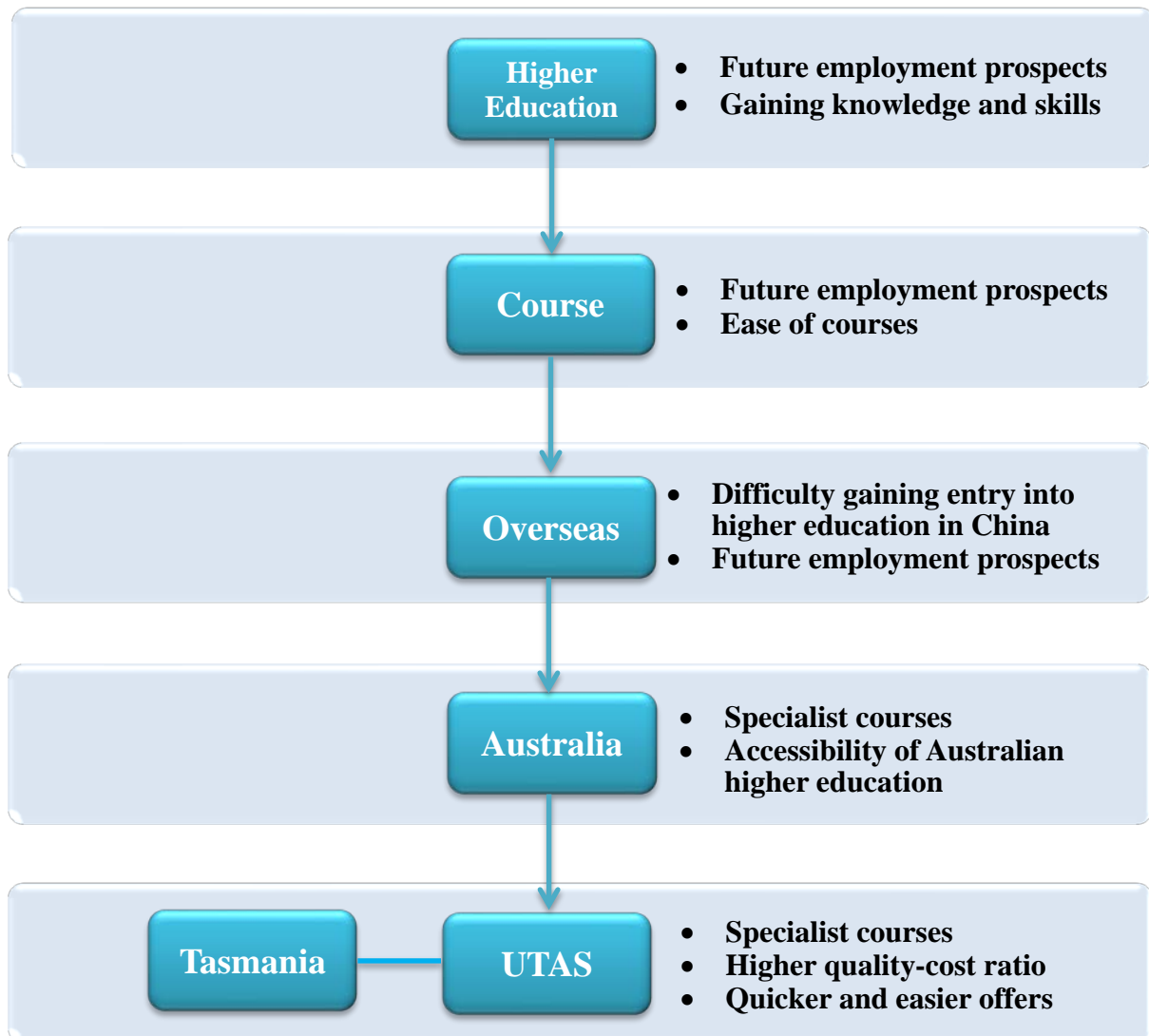


Figure 13.9. The career-oriented decision-making model for the Chinese international students in the case study.

This model begins with the determination by the student to attend university. Most interviewees who were in specialist fields belonging to this model were already employed in Asia. They indicated that their employers valued employee qualifications highly, and that job promotion required a certain level of qualification or a university degree. Moreover, there was an increasing emphasis on continued professional education and development, and hence this qualification would help them gain the knowledge and skills necessary for them to build

competitive capacity. For these reasons, the students decided to undertake higher education.

Another group stated that their previous career had lost its lure for them, and their ideal profession was now in another field, so they had decided to transit to that new domain. Going back to university to gain a higher degree in the new field would assist this transition, and therefore they decided to pursue higher education again.

Students fresh out of university who were also unable to find a suitable job, even if they were fond of their field of study, also hoped to upgrade their qualification and optimise future employment opportunities in that same career field, and so they chose to resume their education.

The decision-making model shows how they proceeded to the choice of course, since they wanted to study in a job-related field. The students in this model all picked professional courses rather than non-professional ones, which is undoubtedly because of their direct professional goals. Among the courses in their current or future fields, these students preferred one which was comparatively easier in terms of admission or graduation. Ease of admission also played a significant role for those who sought for career transition as well as a qualification upgrade. The students did not want to take any risks about graduation, so they usually chose a course which was easier to complete, since recharging at university was just a stepping stone in their career development.

The third choice they made concerned studying overseas rather than remaining in their own country. For enrollers in specialist courses, this was a consequence of the limited number of specialist courses in Chinese higher education, and here too they took into account their future employment prospects. They originally had preferred to receive higher education in their home country, which would not affect their employment adversely, but unfortunately, their choice of courses were limited. It was difficult for them to gain entry into high-quality higher education in those specialist fields in home country. They also came to believe that obtaining an overseas qualification would bring with it more and even better employment opportunities than if they merely held a Chinese qualification.

For the individuals who were looking for a job transition into different fields, or who were seeking better jobs in their field, difficulty in gaining entry into a high-quality degree in China was also the barrier that stopped them studying in China, and so they also came to see that overseas higher education qualifications would be the way to brighter future employment prospects for them, and so they too decided to study overseas.

The students then focused on specific choice of foreign country. For specialist course takers, they only needed to find out which countries offered courses in their field. Non-specialist courses are offered in most countries. However, specialist courses can only be found in a limited number of countries. Among those that offer them, students became interested in Australia due to special attributes of the course offered or the particular benefits that it could bring to them, and therefore they chose Australia as their destination.

For those who enrolled in non-specialist courses, the accessibility of higher education was the main reason for them to choose Australia rather than another English-speaking country. Most of them stated that they took into account the cost of overseas study. Australian higher education costs were more affordable, and a large number of scholarships were offered in Australia. In addition, lower university entry requirements in Australia were another draw card for them, particularly in terms of English language requirements. Those who were employed and pursuing education for career development, as well as new graduates intended to enrol in higher education without a great deal of waiting time, rather than spending precious time preparing for English language tests. In this way, they came to select Australia.

The students then directly considered a host university. Here, their specialist course itself exerted a strong influence over them. Interviewees pointed out that UTAS seemed the only choice in Australia for them due to their specialist course of choice. What is more, students revealed that the particular courses of their interest had world-class fame, and that UTAS qualifications would be recognised in their career field in their home country. Students in the non-specialist courses were driven by the higher quality-cost ratio of UTAS in comparison with other Australian universities. The eventual reason that decided it for the majority of them was quicker and easier offers from UTAS. When they then chose to accept those offers, the choice of region was decided upon by default. Interviewees reflected that it would be great to study in their favourite region in Australia, especially in a big city, but that it was not essential for them. The choice of specific location was not a key one, so it came to be determined by default, secondary to the more important choice of university.

13.3.2.2 Case: Interviewee 1

The interviewee was a Second Mate seafarer in his hometown, working on a ship for a number of years before coming to Australia for study. The main purpose of study for him was to get a job promotion. His expectation was to transfer from a seafarer to an office worker in the marine department of his hometown. The marine department only offered opportunities for this position to seafarers with a Chief Mate Certificate, so he had to upgrade his Second Mate certificate to that higher level.

His hometown also attaches great importance to university degrees, and therefore he believed that his obtainment of a degree related to this maritime field would result in competitive advantage for his position, since at that time, he only had a diploma. Additionally, he needed more nautical knowledge and skills for his work, and so he decided to undertake higher education for both qualifications. This was the starting point of his decision to study at UTAS.

His second choice was for a course in the maritime field, since the ideal position he sought required a maritime certificate. Therefore, his course of choice needed to be at a bachelor level in a maritime-related area with a certificate.

He then started to look for a course provider. He first tried to find a course in his hometown so that he did not have to suspend work to continue studying. Only one institution in his hometown

provided a bachelor's degree course with a seafarer's certificate, but as a top-ranking university in the world, its entry requirements were impossible for him to meet. Also, this course in other parts of China could never be an option for him, since to get that degree and certificate would be even more difficult and complicated there. Alternatively, if he chose to remain in hometown, he would have to study on his own for preparation for the seafarer certificate exams, but there was no access to a degree in the maritime field there. Hence, he realised that he had to study overseas. The high recognition of overseas qualifications in China reinforced his decision to study abroad.

After choosing to study overseas, the next decision he made was about which particular country to go to. His seafarer friends studying abroad shared information with him about Australia as the only overseas country to offer this course with a bachelor's degree and a seafarer certificate. He had originally wanted to study in the U.K. or New Zealand, but the course he needed limited him to Australia.

After coming to Australia, he tried to find out which institutions offered this course. After getting information from his friends, the result for him was Australia, where this course was only provided at UTAS. Some of his seaman friends had already undertaken this specialist course there, and so he chose to come to UTAS for study. In this way, he was not free to make the choice of study location. UTAS is located in Tasmania, so he had to come to Tasmania.

13.3.3 Model Three: The Immigration-Oriented Decision-Making Model

Several of the Chinese international students chose UTAS because of a desire to immigrate to Australia. Unlike the above two orientations associated with gaining a higher education, the immigration motivational orientation seems to be a derivative of overseas higher education. While this cohort was named "international students", their role was practically more like potential migrants for Australia. The ultimate aim of these Chinese international students was not only to gain an overseas academic qualification, but also to obtain Australian PR after graduating. In other words, Australian higher education was the vehicle that they utilised towards permanent immigration to Australia. Their decision making was therefore quite unique among the Chinese international students, and is worth discussing here.

13.3.3.1 The immigration-oriented decision-making model

After analysing both the qualitative and quantitative data collected in the first round of investigations, the weight of strength for each choice in this decision-making process was identified (see Figure 13.10). The starting point here was the choice to head overseas. Then students made the decision to go specifically to Australia. Pursuing higher education was their third choice, which was then followed by their choice of university course. They then chose Tasmania as their destination, and the last selection of theirs was for UTAS.

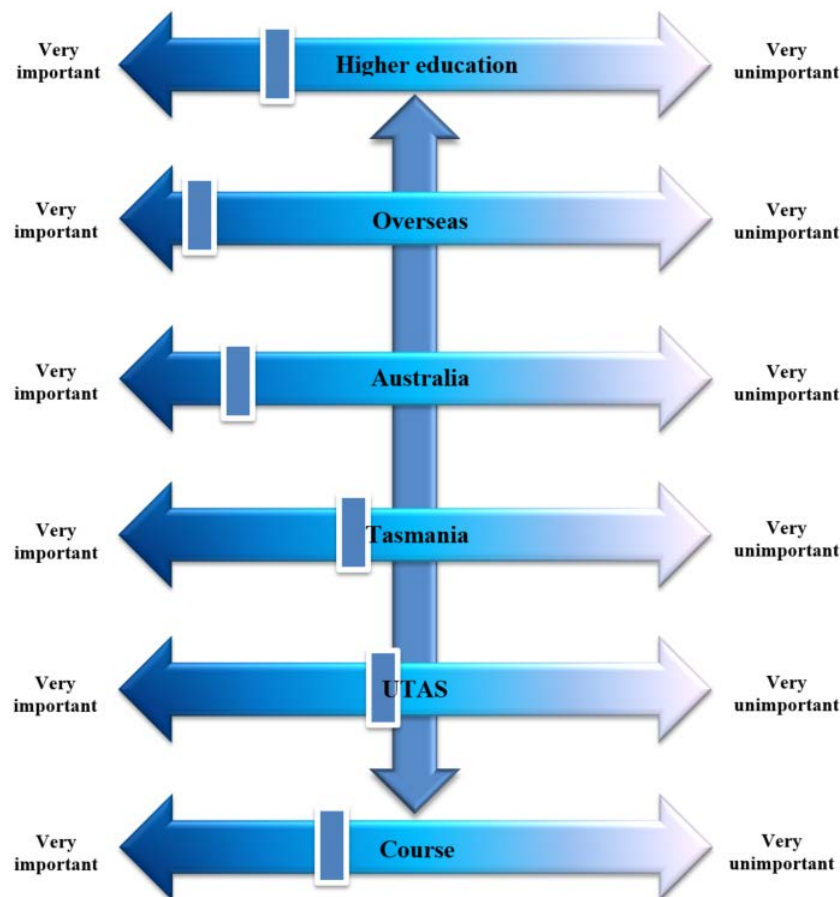


Figure 13.10. The immigration-oriented decision-making process of the Chinese international students in the case study.

Out of consideration for the dynamic interaction among the decision-making process and six choices in this decision making as well as factors related to each choice elaborated on in Chapter 6 to Chapter 11, this immigration-oriented decision-making model was presented in Figure 13.11.

Unlike the decision-making models which started with the choice for higher education, the beginning of this immigration-oriented model was the choice to go overseas. The students were studying in China, or new graduates or employees, but they had no interest in continuing their current jobs anymore, or were facing difficulties in hunting for newer employment. Migration to another country became the solution for them since they perceived it as the only way to change their dissatisfying status quo. They also expected that migration could bring them several other benefits, and their families strongly supported this idea of theirs.

When they started to research migration policies from a number of possible countries, their finding was that Australia is an immigration country, and it is comparatively easier to migrate there than to other places. Also, their personal social links came to play a vital role in helping them make their choice. Some of them had family members or friends living in Australia who strongly recommended for them to immigrate to Australia as well, and they provided them with

first-hand information about it. The students often had even had a prior pleasant study or travel experience to Australia, so they hoped to move there for the sake of the extension of that positive experience. They thus came to select Australia as their migration destination.

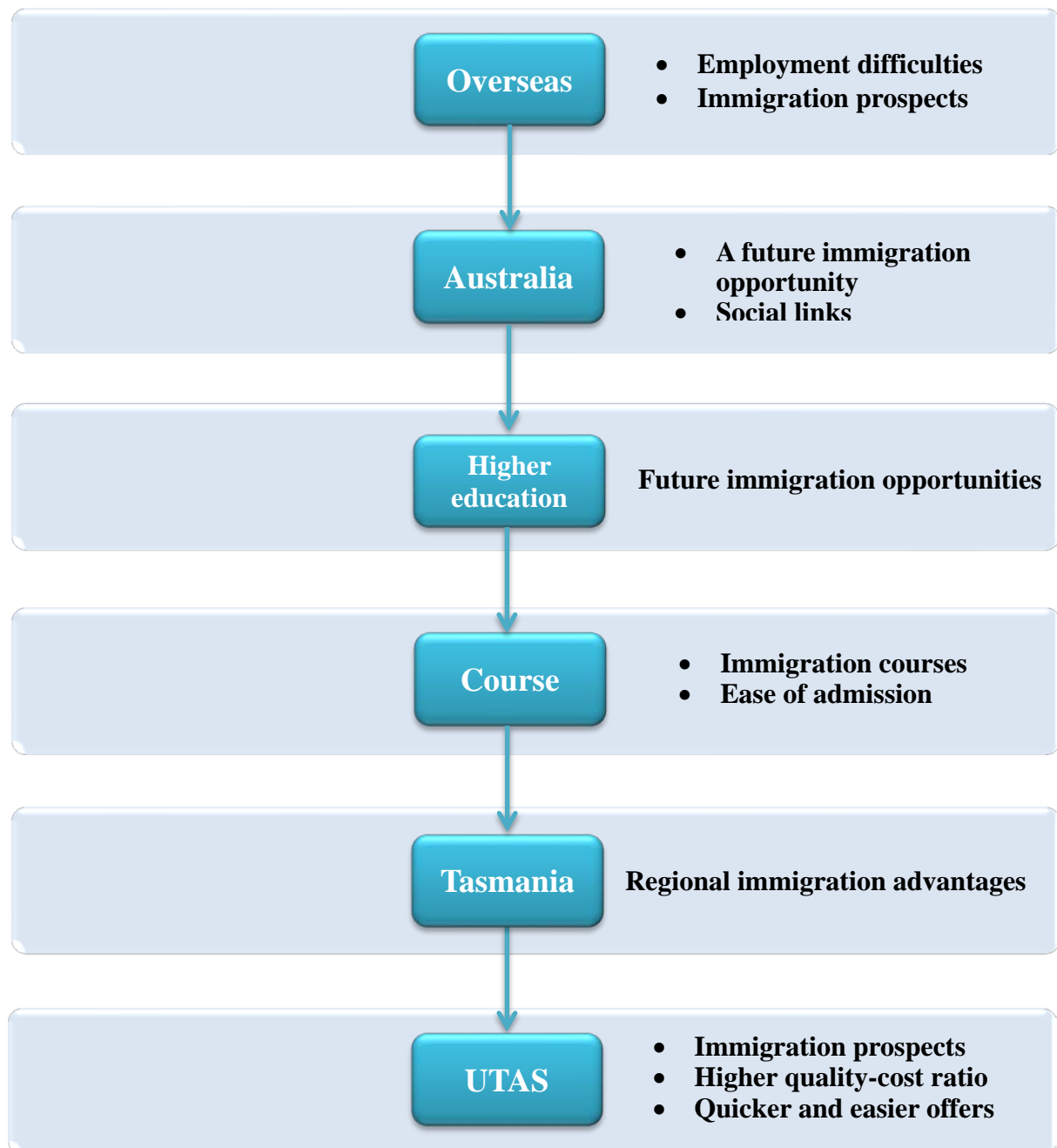


Figure 13.11. The immigration-oriented decision-making model of the Chinese international students in the case study.

After deciding to immigrate to Australia, the students made a concrete plan to obtain Australian PR. Skilled migration is the most common pathway adopted by most of them. This is based on finding an occupation on the list of eligible skilled occupations to do. A skilled occupation assessment must be passed before applying for skilled migration. This assessment usually

requires relevant work experience or Australian study experience. A lack of skilled employment experience due to their young age thus made it virtually impossible for them to pass the assessment immediately. Instead, pursuing Australian higher education as international students was the easiest avenue for them to seek a skilled migration pathway. Chinese international students tend to apply for two types of PR visas, the Skilled Independent visa and the Skilled Nominated visa. These two visas require a 60-point threshold. Most Chinese international students choose a course in Australian higher education to upgrade their previous qualification in order to gain more points for the qualifications section. Based on the above reasons, the students chose to pursue higher education.

The next choice for the students was for a particular course. The Skilled Independent visa was the main stream of skilled migration for Chinese international students, and so they selected an eligible skilled occupation on the list in order to pass the skilled occupation assessment for the visa. Based on that occupation, they enrolled into the relevant immigration course in Australian higher education (these were elaborated on in section 11.3). Most interviewees indicated that their interests were not directly in those immigration courses and relevant occupations, but the strong desire to immigrate had led them to choose one from among them. Ease of admission was also the other main reason for them to choose one of those courses. To meet the requirement of the immigration occupation, several of the students had to choose study fields which differed from their prior majors. Compared to other courses, many immigration courses had no previous training or qualification requirements, so that it was quite easy to enrol into them. What is more, they pointed out that the other entry requirements for these immigration courses, such as English language requirements, were comparatively lower than those of “non-immigration courses”.

The students then chose a regional Australian state as their Australian study location. They paid great attention here to the choice of Tasmania because of the immigration advantages that it has. Studying in regional Australia brings extra points, which was crucial in their application, as most of the Chinese international students had difficulties in reaching the 60-point threshold. Furthermore, more opportunities for skilled immigration are offered for international students who graduate from Tasmania. Students can also choose to apply for the Skilled Nominated visa if they choose Tasmania as their study destination. There is also a wider range of occupations in the Tasmanian Skilled Occupation List for the Skilled Nominated visa than that for the Skilled Independent visa, so the students had more opportunities there to pursue their personal interests in their immigration plan. Other extra points for applying for the Skilled Nominated visa are also brought from the nomination by the Tasmanian Government. Those regional immigration advantages appealed to Chinese international students who thus went on to choose a regional state, Tasmania.

Eventually, the students decided to study at UTAS, the only university in Tasmania. This takes advantage of the state’s regional immigration advantages. The higher quality-cost ratio at UTAS in comparison with other Australian universities also served to reinforce this decision of theirs. Faster offers from UTAS also played an important role in them accepting their offers. Finally, the application process was comparatively easier than for other Australian universities.

13.3.3.2 Case: Interviewee 6

Before coming to UTAS to do master's course, interviewee six obtained her bachelor's course at a Chinese university. The major in China was her interest. However, she came to realise that the job market in China lacked decent job opportunities for people with a bachelor's degree in that major. She had a horrible internship experience with a low salary but heavy workload in the year before graduation in China, so she lost all confidence in her major. It was then that she started to consider how to change her situation. Since her family had a trend to migrate to other countries, and many of her relatives of the same generation had already migrated overseas, she came to see migration to another country as a way to change her situation.

After deciding to migrate, she had to consider her country of destination. Her parents originally had had a plan to send her to Australia for immigration after obtaining her bachelor's degree in China. However, she had decided to find a good job in China rather than follow that idea. After considering her employment difficulties, migration to Australia became a real solution for her. Having many relatives in Australia, word-of-mouth referral from them enticed her to choose Australia for herself as well. Previously she had taken a summer holiday with her parents in one of the Australian states while studying in China, and really loved it. Spain was also taken into consideration, because Spanish had been her minor. Compared to Australia however, Spain would be more difficult to migrate to. Taking into all of these factors into account, she decided on Australia as her migration destination.

With her mother's help she began to plan to relocate. Skilled migration was her focus. Her mother then downloaded the Skilled Occupation List for skilled migration online. It was clear that the best approach for her was to receive an Australian higher education, because no work experience meant that she could not pass the skilled occupation assessment. She and her family highly value qualifications however, so she decided to continue studying to a master's degree in Australia.

Her next choice was for a specific course of study. She focused on immigration courses since the Skilled Independent visa was her preference. Although she was still interested in her previous major, it was not included as one of the immigration courses. The suggestions she received from education agents were a choice from two other majors. Without any interests in either of those courses, she decided upon a process of elimination to decide her final major. Her mother told her that the chosen major was in the Skilled Occupation List of that time. Her cousin in Australia also suggested that she undertakes a course in that particular major. She also came to think that being a professional in that major would offer a promising career for her. Thus, she selected that particular course.

Her fifth choice was for a regional Australian state. She chose regional Australia for the sake of gaining extra points in her application of the Skilled Independent visa. This was because she would still be quite young age when graduating from UTAS, and that could not bring her enough age points, so that she had to collect extra points from studying in regional Australia in

order to reach 60-point threshold.

Finally, she focused on the selection of higher education institution. There were two reasons for her to not choose a university in the Go8: First, education agents in China told her that the quality of Australian universities was equally high across the board. Second, a member of the Go8 she was interested in was not affordable for her in terms of tuition fees. Based on that information she simultaneously applied to two regional Australian universities, UTAS and another university. However, the application process for the other university was so confusing that she made a mistake when applying for it, and no offer ever came from that institution. The application for UTAS was much simpler, and more importantly, UTAS made her a very prompt offer. UTAS also offered her 25% tuition fee discount scholarship. Based on all of the above reasons, she came to choose UTAS as her study destination.

13.4 Conclusion

Three models that replicate the decision-making stages of the Chinese international students in the case study were first identified and then interpreted in this chapter. As the starting point for deriving these models, a choice-strength framework was established from an exploratory and inductive perspective. Mirroring the different strength of choices in the process of decision making, as well as the dynamic interactions between them, a choice-strength framework was employed to interpret both the qualitative and quantitative data in an effort to reveal the Chinese international students' decision-making processes. By the integration of these processes with the six individual choices in question, as well as the factors that impacted on those choices discussed in the last few chapters, the Chinese international students' decision-making models in the case study were ultimately formulated.

Instead of building a single decision-making model for the whole research cohort, three decision-making models were generated in view of their distinct motivational orientations, centring respectively on qualifications, career and immigration. Apart from the theoretical interpretation of each decision-making model based on a flowchart, a most representative interviewee case for each model was identified and described, to further clarify the corresponding model.

It is worth noting that these three decision-making models were simplified decision-making paths. Each of them reflected a single motivational orientation in the decision making of the students. In tying together the outcomes of the analysis, unsurprisingly no two decision-making journeys of the interviewees were completely alike, and every decision making was quite complex.

This research found a commonality among the Chinese international students in the fact that decisions made by the majority of them were guided primarily by one dominant motivation, mixed then with secondary motivations. That is, all of the Chinese international students in this research were guided by one of three types of primary motivations: qualifications, career or

immigration. Most Chinese international students generally took into account multiple facets, such as qualifications, or career and immigration when making the decision to study at UTAS. Usually however, only one of these became their motivational orientation, such that their whole decision making was actually guided by it. Special cases were minor in this research, but selected as the example for each decision-making model in the last section, since those Chinese international students who were led only by one strong aspiration without any secondary motivations were the most representative for the three models.

A number of similarities and differences among the three models were identified. First, the determination to undertake higher education and the decision to go abroad were usually positioned at the top of the decision-making processes among all three decision-making models. This clarifies the great importance of these two choices in Chinese international students' minds. It implies that with the continuing impact of CHC in modern China, Chinese people still attach great importance to higher education and greatly value higher education qualifications. Additionally, unlike the choice of pursuing higher education, the importance of going abroad as an unconventional thought in the mindset of Chinese people seemed to be growing nowadays.

Second, among the three decision-making models, the importance the students placed on choosing a particular university, namely UTAS, was ranked quite low, usually at the bottom of the decision-making processes. The focus of the Chinese international students was clearly on the other choices.

Third, in the decision-making models, the choice of region, Tasmania was either a default choice, secondary to the choice of UTAS, or it was considered as the least important choice in the whole process. This means that most of the Chinese international students did not intentionally pick Tasmania, except for the students in the immigration-oriented decision-making model.

Fourthly, the choice of course of specialisation was placed quite differently in each of the models. Career-oriented Chinese international students ranked the course as one of their most important choices, since future career possibilities depended on it. The course was also important for immigration-oriented Chinese international students since the selection of an immigration course would immediately shape their future immigration possibilities. Compared to above two cohorts however, course choice was much less important for qualification-oriented Chinese international students.

Finally, Australia was definitely taken into consideration as a study destination country by the Chinese international students in the three groups, but not as the most important factor in their decision-making process.

In this way, the second research question (what decision-making processes do Chinese international students go through when deciding to enrol in a regional Australian university?), and the third research question (what decision-making models can be identified for Chinese

international students choosing to study in a regional Australian university?), for the primary research objective (to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university) have been addressed in this chapter.

PART C: CONCLUSION

Chapter 14 Contributions to New Knowledge

14.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of the research journey described in this thesis and presents the study's contributions to new knowledge, with a focus on its theoretical contributions. To be specific, the chapter begins by revisiting the research aims, objectives and questions. Second, the general decision-making models adopted by international students in relation to overseas higher education are interpreted, so as to generalise the research theories from the current case study. The implications and recommendations of this study will be introduced and elaborated in the next chapter.

14.2 Revisiting the Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

This section revisits the research aims, objectives and questions put forward in Chapter 1 in order to draw together all the findings of this study, as well as to form conclusions that respond to the thesis title question.

This study has offered five dominant findings in response to the five research questions. Four of these outcomes were related to the first research objective (to examine how Chinese international students make their pre-departure decision to enrol in a regional Australian university). The second research objective (to identify how Chinese international students perceive their experiences of a regional Australian university after their overseas study sojourn) was addressed by another key finding. Through addressing all five research questions and attaining all two research objectives, the two research aims have been achieved, that is the specific aim to examine the decisions made by Chinese international students when selecting to study in a regional Australian university, as well as to discover their post-sojourn satisfaction with their decision, and the more general one, to develop models for students' decision making.

The following sections summarise the main findings related to the research questions, and serve as evidence that the research objectives and aims of the study have been achieved.

14.2.1 What Are the Factors Influencing the Choices of Chinese International Students in Their Decision to Enrol in a Regional Australian University?

The first research outcome is a wide range of key factors that influenced the Chinese international students' decisions about higher education at a regional Australian university. These factors were oriented to three dominant student motivations for pursuing overseas education, namely qualifications, career and immigration, and span social, economic, academic, cultural, and personal spheres. Different factors had different levels of importance for different students. More specifically, some factors actually catalysed some students' decisions to receive higher education at UTAS, whereas the same factors were only a secondary influence for other

students. Nevertheless, this group of factors form a comprehensive and holistic pool for Chinese international students to refer to when thinking about whether to enrol in a regional Australian university.

Six separate major and distinct choices made up the stages of their decision-making processes. These were the choices to engage in higher education, to head overseas, to decide on Australia as the destination, to choose Tasmania specifically, for UTAS, and to enrol in a specific course. The extent to which each of these six choices guided the students' decisions has been identified and articulated respectively in six logically ordered chapters, Chapters 6 to 11. Some of the factors which were found to influence the students' choices were similar to those reported in the previous literature, but the majority were different from the earlier studies. Others were new findings from this research that have not been reported previously.

14.2.2 What Decision-Making Processes Do Chinese International Students Go Through When Deciding to Enrol in a Regional Australian University?

Another significant research outcome of this study is the choice-strength framework (see Figure 13.1 in section 13.2). This incorporates the six choices of the decision-making process that underpinned the students' decisions. More importantly, this framework also shows the significance of each choice and the interactions among them. Through the choice-strength framework, three functional decision-making processes for Chinese international students were derived; by adopting it to reflect the case, and by taking into account the three motivational orientations evidenced among the study participants. The qualification-oriented decision-making process of the Chinese international students could then be further divided into two sub-processes according to attributes of their university programs, and one of its sub-processes, the qualification-oriented decision-making process (for non-joint education programs) includes two decision-making processes based on students seeking different degrees.

In this way, it was found that the decision-making processes undertaken by the Chinese international students were qualification-oriented decision-making process (for joint education programs)(see Figure 13.3 in section 13.3.1.1), qualification-oriented decision-making process for bachelor's degree seekers (for non-joint education programs)(see Figure 13.5 in section 13.3.1.2), qualification-oriented decision-making process for higher degree seekers (for non-joint education programs)(see Figure 13.6 in section 13.3.1.2), career-oriented decision-making process (see Figure 13.8 in section 13.3.2.1) and immigration-oriented decision-making process (see Figure 13.10 in section 13.3.3.1). These respond directly to the second research question.

14.2.3 What Decision-Making Models Can Be Identified for Chinese International Students Choosing to Study in a Regional Australian University?

The models formulated to represent Chinese international student decision making about studying at a regional Australian university are a key outcome for this research question. The

components of the decision-making models, that is, choices, factors and processes, are shown in Figure 3.1 (see section 3.1), which were integrated in order to derive the models. A choice-strength framework and a flowchart of the decision-making processes, including the six key choices and the corresponding influencing factors, contributed to the structures of the Chinese international students' decision-making models.

As mentioned earlier, the three major motivational orientations were integrated, resulting in three decision-making models: qualification-oriented decision-making models (see Figure 13.4 in section 13.3.1.1 and Figure 13.7 in section 13.3.1.2), career-oriented decision-making model (see Figure 13.9 in section 13.3.2.1), and immigration-oriented decision-making model (see Figure 13.11 in section 13.3.3.1). There were two versions of the qualification-oriented decision-making model, depending on the types of higher education programs in which the Chinese international students were enrolled; that is joint (see Figure 13.4 in section 13.3.1.1), and non-joint education programs (see Figure 13.7 in section 13.3.1.2).

14.2.4 Is It Possible to Derive More General Decision-Making Models for Overseas Study? If Yes, What Are These Models?

It is possible to derive more general decision-making models from the above results. Following the rationale of decision-making models found in the case study three types of models are constructed, the qualification-oriented models, the career-oriented model and the immigration-oriented model. The qualification-oriented decision-making models are divided into one for students in joint education programs and one for those in non-joint education programs. Section 14.3 will elaborate on these generalised models.

14.2.5 Did Chinese International Students Evaluate Their Decision to Study at a Regional Australian University as Worthwhile After Graduation from This University?

Chapter 12 discussed the students' post-sojourn satisfaction with their decisions to travel to study at UTAS, which addressed the fifth research question. According to the interview data, the majority of the Chinese international students assessed their decision as worthwhile, and they felt they had fulfilled most of their original expectations for their UTAS study journey. Additionally, the students stated that they had taken the right factors into consideration when they made their decisions to study at UTAS.

14.3 General Overseas Higher Education Decision-Making Models of International Students

This section will make some generalisations from the UTAS case study models of the Chinese international students to the larger population of international students. In other words, it will propose general overseas higher education decision-making models for international students. These generalisations are offered in this chapter here because they themselves are a specific

kind of conclusion. Another reason to present them in this chapter is because the generalised decision-making models address the question posed in the thesis title, “How do students make decisions about overseas higher education?”.

The following sections will justify the generalisation of the established case study models, and then present the generalised decision-making models.

14.3.1 Justification of Generalisation

There are four rationales that add credibility to the claim that the models generated in this study can be generalised to the wider international student population (see Figure 14.1).

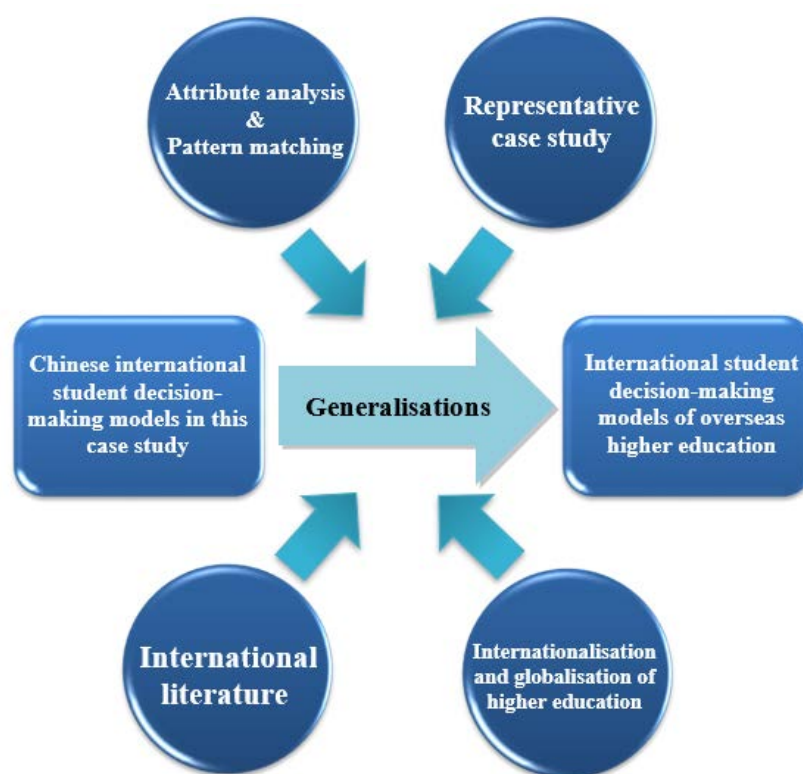


Figure 14.1. Rationales that support the generalisation of the decision-making models.

First of all, the decision-making models from the case in this research could be generalised as a result of attribute analysis and pattern matching, based on Eisner’s theory about usable generalisations from qualitative data. The rationale of attribute analysis and pattern matching supports the idea of making a generalisation from a qualitative analysis rather than the formal inference of statistics (Eisner, 1991). This research was of an induction-dominated nature. A case study is a combination of attributes of a phenomenon. Patterns mirror the relationship between parts of a phenomenon. So other cases in the world possibly have the same attributes and patterns as those of the case in this research. To be more specific, this research was a case study of Chinese international students studying in a regional Australian university. From the case study, choices, factors, processes and decision-making models were derived. Choices,

factors and processes represent decision-making attributes demonstrated by the sample group. The decision-making models from the case drew upon the interactions among the attributes of an image. It is reasonable to generalise to students of other nationalities and in other contexts. They are likely to make the same choices, take the same factors into account and go through similar processes of decision making. It is likely that there will be cultural difference in the weightings given to each factor, but the same factors will apply. Similarly, the decision-making processes are likely to be related closely, but could result in somewhat different outcomes depending on cultural and contextual factors. This allows us to conclude deductively that the decision-making models of this research can be used to interpret the patterns in decision making about overseas higher education in an even greater range of contexts.

Second, the case study of Chinese international students enrolled at UTAS is representative of international students who have received higher education abroad. According to the background information presented in Chapter 1, the cohort of international students at UTAS was not large in comparison with its counterparts in other Australian universities. The proportion of international students at UTAS was ranked No. 34 of 41 Australian universities (DET, 2017g). With such a small cohort, it was comparatively easy for the researcher to look at the whole picture of Chinese international students at UTAS. The largest group of all international students at UTAS was from China, accounting for more than one-third of the international student numbers there (UTAS, 2017b). Moreover, this research had a high rate of survey responses (459 of 835) and a large interviewee group (23). For these reasons, it can be argued that the Chinese international students provided an accurate reflection of the international students at UTAS in general. Moreover, UTAS is the only university in Tasmania. So it can be argued further that the Chinese international students at UTAS were the most representative cohort of all international tertiary students in Tasmania.

China sends far more international students to Australia for higher education than do other countries (DET, 2017a). UTAS is one of the 41 Australian universities. Hence, we could say that the case study of Chinese international students at UTAS could be generalised to the broader context of international students in Australia.

Similarly, globally, China is the top source country of international enrolments at the tertiary level (DET, 2017i). It is apparent that the decision-making models used by these students have high validity in this context, and are replicated across the country. Therefore, these could be generalisable and applicable to decision-making models for international students seeking higher education in the more global context.

Third, the use of the literature-derived framework for making choices of this research supports the generalisability of the models derived from this case study. This framework was deduced from relevant past studies on the international stage, encompassing not only Australia-based research but also several commonly cited projects from other countries (see Chapter 3). Also, as mentioned in Chapter 3, these previous relevant studies focused not only on Chinese international students but also on other international students of diverse nationalities. The implication is that this particular case study could possibly be generalised to international

students from different countries. Furthermore, the diversity of the reviewed international literature implies that choices, factors and processes are three necessary elements of decision-making models in general. The majority of factors identified in this study reflect the interrelated national and international literature. Thus, with the data collected from Chinese international students at a regional Australian university were found to be sufficiently consistent with those in higher education in other parts of the world for generalisations to be made. Thus, although the models from this study, discussed in the previous chapter, were based on a case study, the accounts of interrelated research help somewhat to reduce the need to collect data from samples interstate or in another country in order to make generalisations.

Finally, the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education is another reason why the decision-making models derived from this case study can be generalised to a wider population. The enormous wealth that comes from the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education (see section 1.3.1) has led to the assimilation of decision making by international students from all over the world about overseas study. Hence, there is a high probability that the case study decision-making models can be generalised to other international students and diverse decisions about overseas higher education. However, internationalisation and globalisation are neither as developed nor growing as rapidly in other education sectors, so it may not be appropriate to generalise the decision-making models from this study to contexts outside the higher education sector.

All of the justifications presented above present a strong case that the Chinese international student decision-making models developed from this case study can be generalised to a wider context of international students seeking overseas higher education. Nevertheless, because of the features of the case study, any generalisation from these decision-making models cannot be absolutely certain. Thus, such generalisations should be treated cautiously and future research could consider testing them.

14.3.2 General Overseas Higher Education Decision-Making Models of International Students

Prior to proposing the general decision-making models, three key relevant rationales need to be elaborated.

Initially, the choice-strength framework derived from the case study can be applied to other overseas study cases around the world. The set of six continua in the choice-strength framework were derived from the six distinct dimensions of decision making proposed in the literature-derived framework for making choices. That framework was developed from a substantial review of international literature. That is, no matter where students come from, they make the same six choices when selecting overseas higher education.

In addition, the positions of the riders on the six spectra in the general choice-strength framework reflect the importance of these six choices in international student decision making,

so eventually they echo international students' decision-making processes. Dynamic interactions among the choices, as shown in the general choice-strength framework, apply to international students all over the world, in the form of a vertical double-headed arrow among the spectra. The choice-strength framework for international students' decisions about overseas study was thus generated (see Figure 14.2).

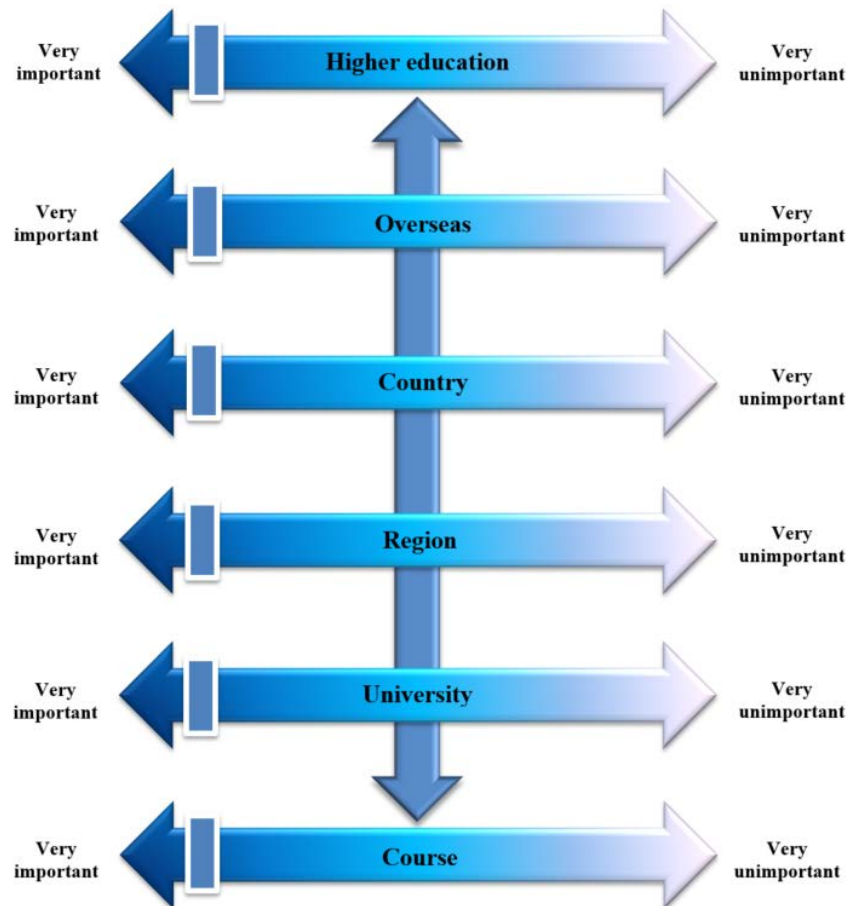


Figure 14.2. The choice-strength framework for international students making decisions about overseas higher education.

Second, the decision-making models of international students in other parts of the world also encompass all three key components of choices, factors and processes. This thesis posits that these three elements can be used to formulate decision-making models (see Figure 3.1), which is a rationale for theory formulation. This rationale guides not only the case study, but also other cases in more general contexts. Thus, it can be generalised that the three vital components establish decision-making models. Additionally, none of those three elements is dispensable, and they are equally important.

Third, the three motivational orientations for decision making, qualifications, career and immigration gathered from this research (see Figure 14.3) are not peculiar to Chinese international students and their situation. International students universally have these three motivations guiding their decisions about overseas higher education, as seen in the related

literature represented in Chapter 6 to Chapter 11.

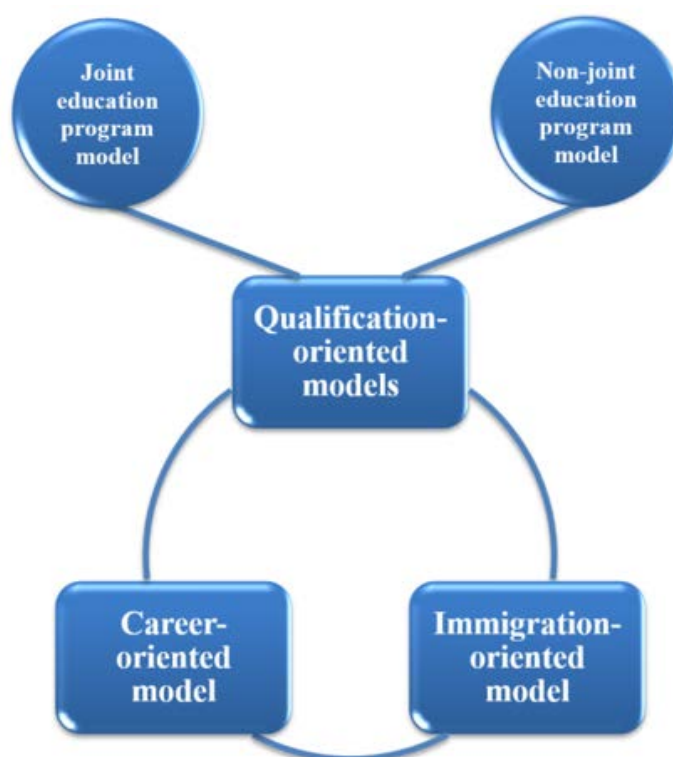


Figure 14.3. Types of general overseas higher education decision-making models of international students.

It is also significant that the qualification-oriented models consisted of joint and non-joint education programs. Joint education programs are a vital category in the international education world, since transnational higher education has recently increased exponentially as a worldwide phenomenon (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). Decisions about enrolling in joint education programs are more restricted than those in non-joint education programs.

The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs) is a model for international students enrolled in joint education programs who have a strong motivation for qualifications guiding them throughout their decision making. The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs) is for international students who are strongly motivated by qualifications and enrolled in non-joint education programs. There is a slight difference between bachelor's degree seekers and higher degree seekers. In the career-oriented decision-making model, career is the key motivational orientation for those international students. Courses undertaken by this cohort incorporated both specialist and non-specialist courses. Some international students primarily driven by a desire to immigrate by means of the education system act in accordance with the immigration-oriented decision-making model.

It is worth noting that the four general decision-making models cover all the possible

interpretations when international students are making decisions about studying overseas, but this does not mean that all models are applicable to every context. Some models could be more applicable to international students choosing higher education in a particular country or a certain region.

Drawing on the above rationales, three decision-making models for international students and general overseas higher education have been formulated and will now be interpreted. Decision-making processes shown in the choice-strength framework and decision-making model will be represented as a pair in each model section.

14.3.2.1 Model one: The qualification-oriented decision-making models

(1) The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs)

The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs) is a model for international students enrolled in joint education programs who have a strong motivation for qualifications guiding them throughout their decision making. Instead of completing their entire program in their home country, this cohort is driven to cross borders in order to seek higher qualifications. The qualification-oriented decision-making process (for those in joint education programs), derived from the choice-strength framework, is shown in Figure 14.4, where the importance of the six choices is represented by riders across the spectra, and the positions of the riders reflect their decision-making process.

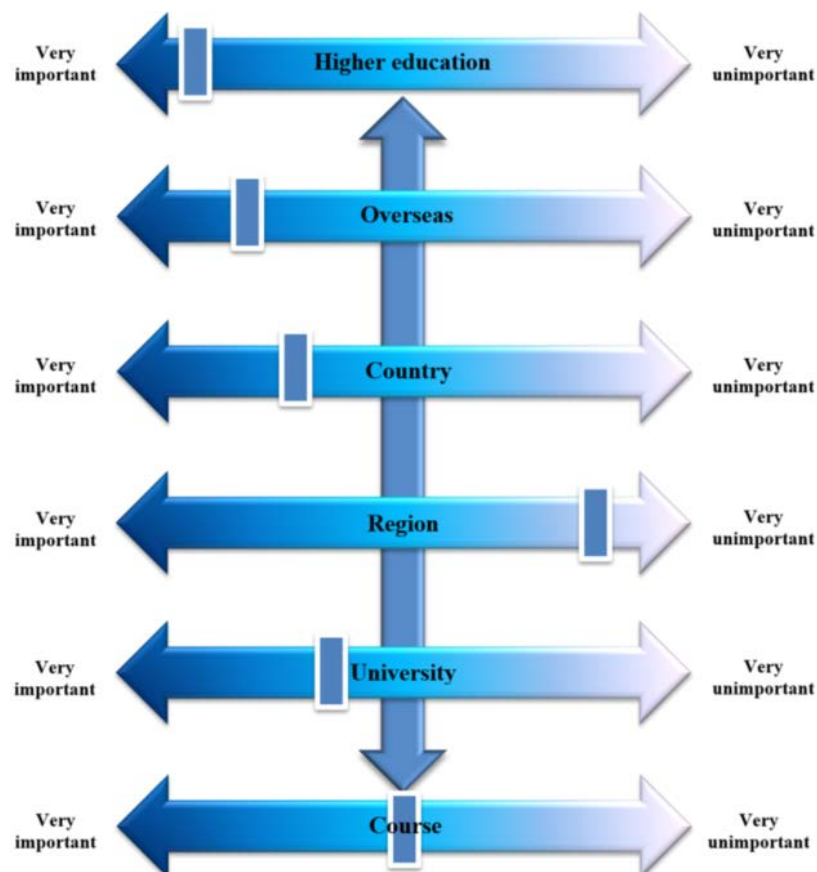


Figure 14.4. The qualification-oriented decision-making process (for joint education programs) for international students seeking overseas higher education.

Figure 14.5 integrates student priorities into a flowchart. This group of international students started their decision making with the choice to receive higher education rather than to hunt for a job, since their primary goal was to gain a qualification. The second choice in this decision making was for study overseas. Instead of completing the whole program in their home country, the overseas qualification was the main driver for seeking higher education abroad. The particular country was the next choice. Although they may have been interested in an alternative place, the joint education program in which they had enrolled limited their choice of country. The cohort then went on to choose a university. Due to the cooperation between their home country university and an overseas university, they had to come to this particular university rather than any other. The choice of region had thus been determined by the location of this particular overseas university. This decision-making model ends with the choice of course. The students could only choose courses in a certain school or faculty of that overseas university due to credit transfer rules and agreements with the joint education program.

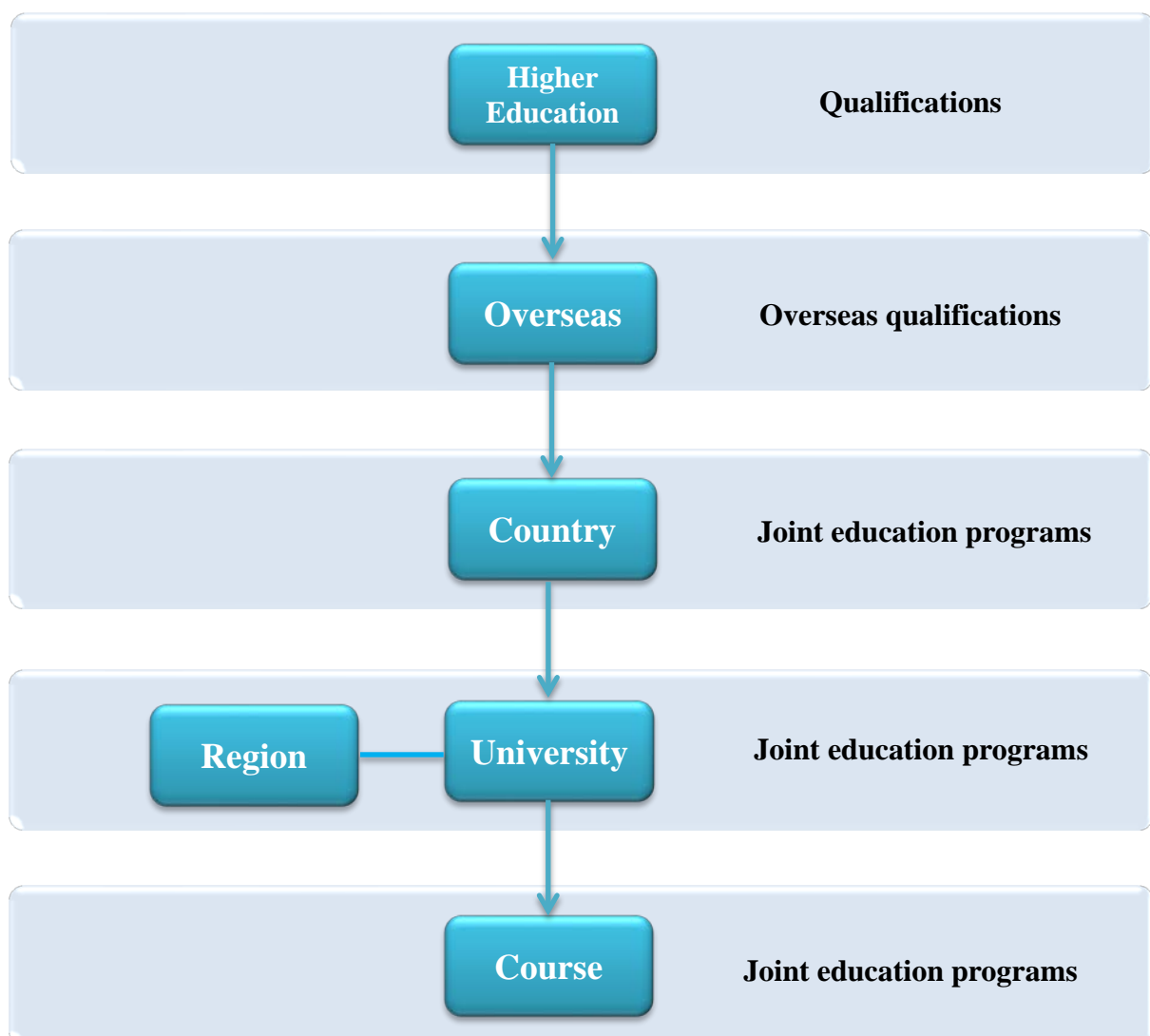


Figure 14.5. The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs) for international students seeking overseas higher education.

(2) The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs)

The other decision-making model for international students motivated by qualifications was the qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs). Unlike the other qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs), this one was less restricted by the educational programs themselves. The decision-making process for this cohort had one difference, that between the bachelor's degree and higher degree seekers, as shown in Figure 14.6 and Figure 14.7. Specifically, the undergraduates placed more weight on the country of choice than on the choice of course, while the postgraduates considered the course is considered to be much more important than the country.

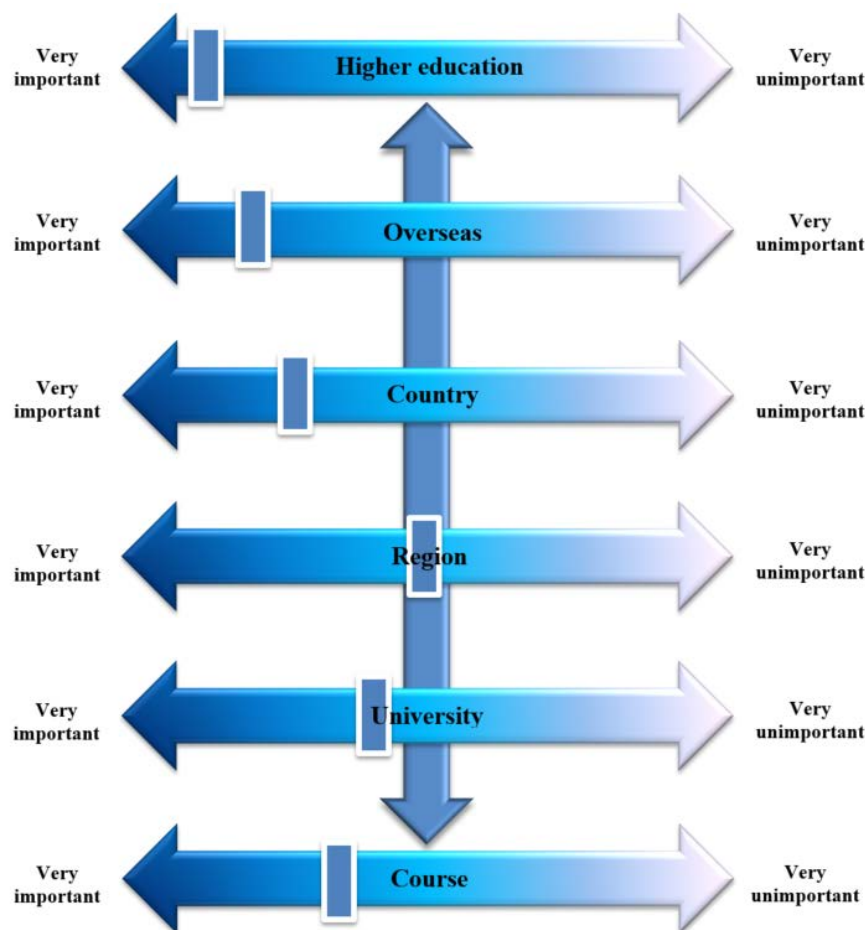


Figure 14.6. The qualification-oriented decision-making process (for non-joint education programs) for international bachelor's degree seekers.

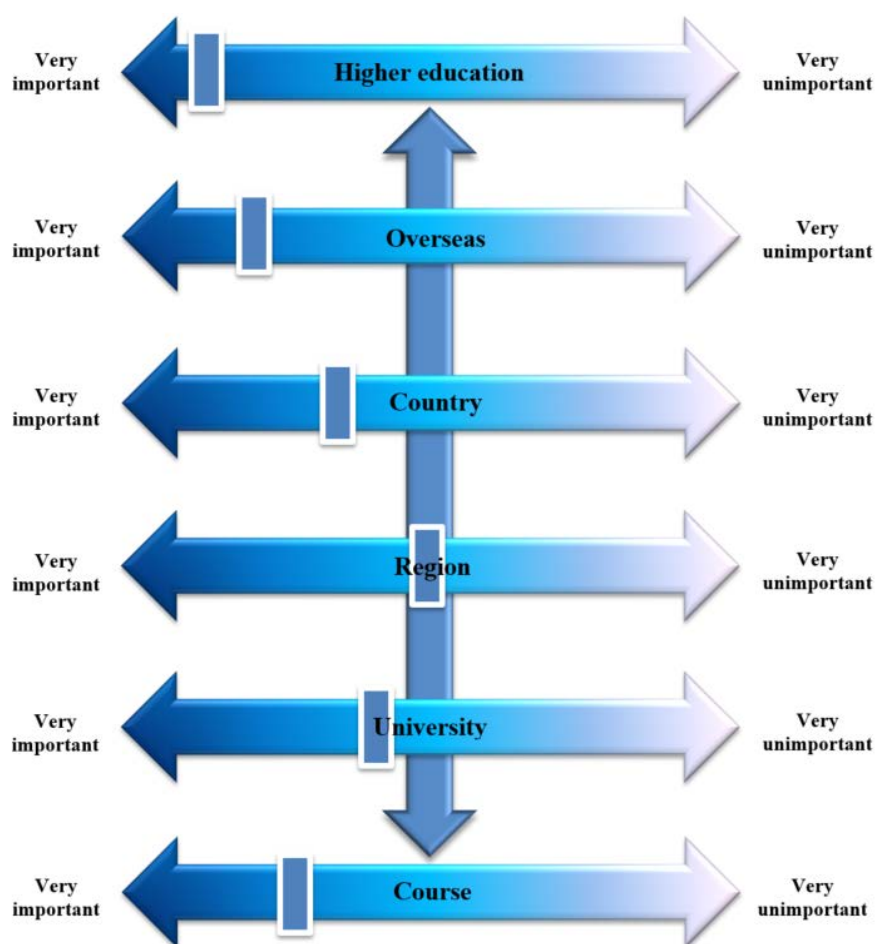


Figure 14.7. The qualification-oriented decision-making process (for non-joint education programs) for international higher degree seekers.

Derived from the above decision-making processes and supplemented by the major influencing factors, this qualification-oriented decision-making model for international students (for non-joint education programs) has been drawn (see Figure 14.8). This group of international students are keen to gain a qualification, and therefore seek higher education as their first choice. They were also influenced by the desire to keep up with other family members' good levels of education. They then chose to travel overseas for that education, due to the lack of access to the desired qualification in their home country. The subsequent choice for bachelor's degree seekers was the specific country, and in most cases this choice was made by their parents. The parents' expectations and aspirations meant that the students would be allowed to engage in higher education in a country with a good study environment, such as accessibility of higher education in the host country, an English-speaking country, a good reputation for higher education in the world and a good physical environment. The students then chose a particular course on the basis of their own interests. However, the higher degree seekers were already committed to their field of study and so tried to ensure that they could continue on in their chosen fields. Hence, in their case, the course was the third choice. After the course selection, the choice of destination country was made. If they had failed to gain admission to graduate school in their home country, the smooth entry into a postgraduate study in a destination

country for them was of great significance. The fifth choice for them was then for a specific university. With a deep drive for a university qualification, the specific reasons for picking their particular university were issues such as the arrival of a quick and an easy offer, a higher quality-cost ratio, and acceptance of credit transfer. The final choice for them was then the particular region. A conducive study environment in the region where the university was located propelled them onto accepting the offer of a place.

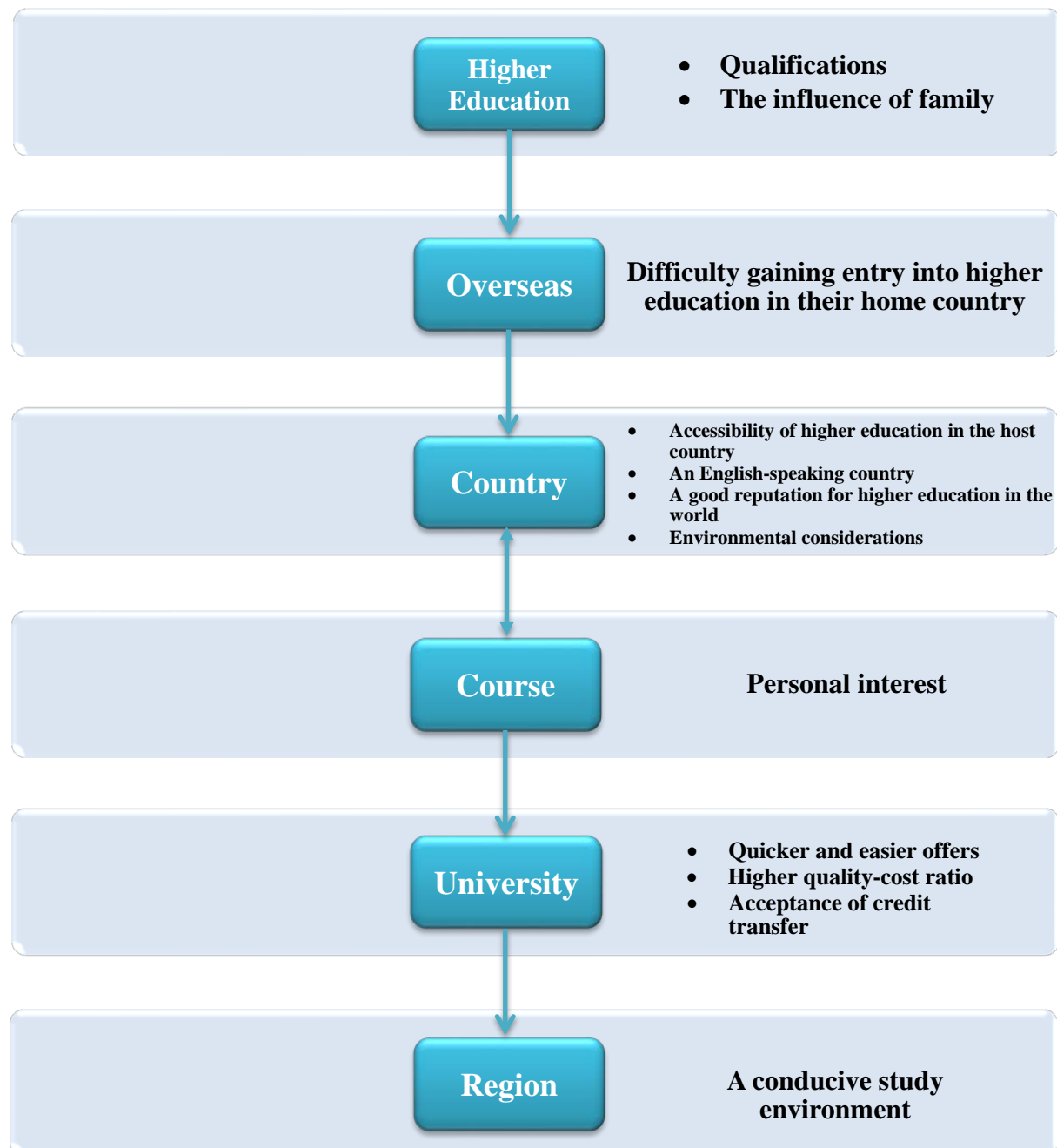


Figure 14.8. The qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs) for international students seeking overseas higher education.

14.3.2.2 Model two: The career-oriented decision-making model

Career was another key motivational orientation for some of the international students, regardless of whether they were already employed or not. Some of these were targeting job promotion in the same career area, or looking for a transition to another career field, while others' aspirations were more about simply finding a decent job. Courses undertaken by this cohort incorporated both specialist and non-specialist courses, but international students in either of these had the same decision-making process and similar influencing factors. The career-oriented decision-making process is shown in Figure 14.9.

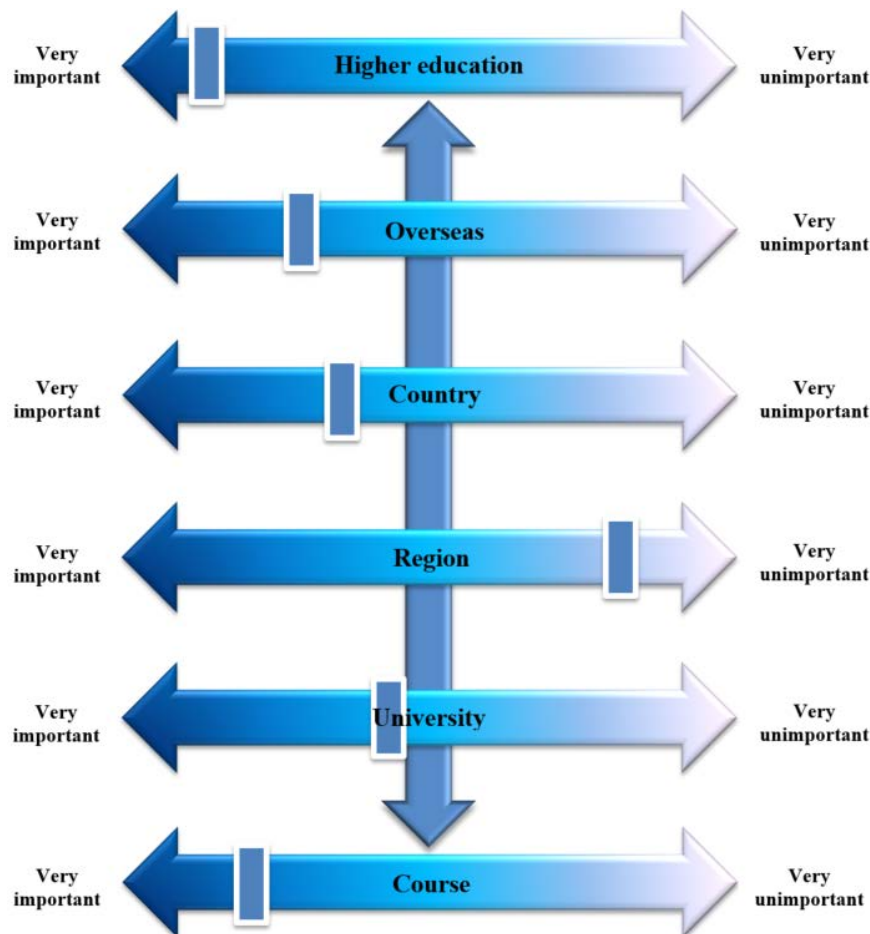


Figure 14.9. The career-oriented decision-making process for international students seeking overseas higher education.

Figure 14.10 starts with the choice to receive higher education. Students who wanted to be promoted in the same career field required a tertiary qualification and perceived the knowledge and skills gained through higher education as being for their professional development. For the group hoping to transit into a new career field, higher education was a way to speed up that transition. The students with qualifications but who were not able to find satisfying jobs saw upgrading their education as a way to bring them better employment opportunities in the future. Driven by a strong career motivation, their next choice was for a specific academic course, since they were already very clear about what they wanted to learn. Studying in their job-related

field could help improve their employment prospects in that area. Ease of admission and graduation was a key principle that helped them to select a particular course in the chosen domain. They then chose to study overseas. Limited choices of specialist courses or difficulty in gaining access to a high-quality higher education in their home country pushed them abroad for study, as well as a belief that better work opportunities could be theirs with an overseas university qualification. The fourth choice was for a country of destination. Those wanting to take specialist courses were limited to the countries offering these courses. International students hoping to enrol in non-specialist courses were enticed by the accessibility of higher education in a particular host country. After this, a specific university was selected. Those who had already selected a specialist course only had to choose a university offering that course; while for those taking a non-specialist course, a higher quality-cost ratio, and a quicker and easier offer were the two key attractions that guided their choice. The particular place of study is limited for them to the location of their chosen university.

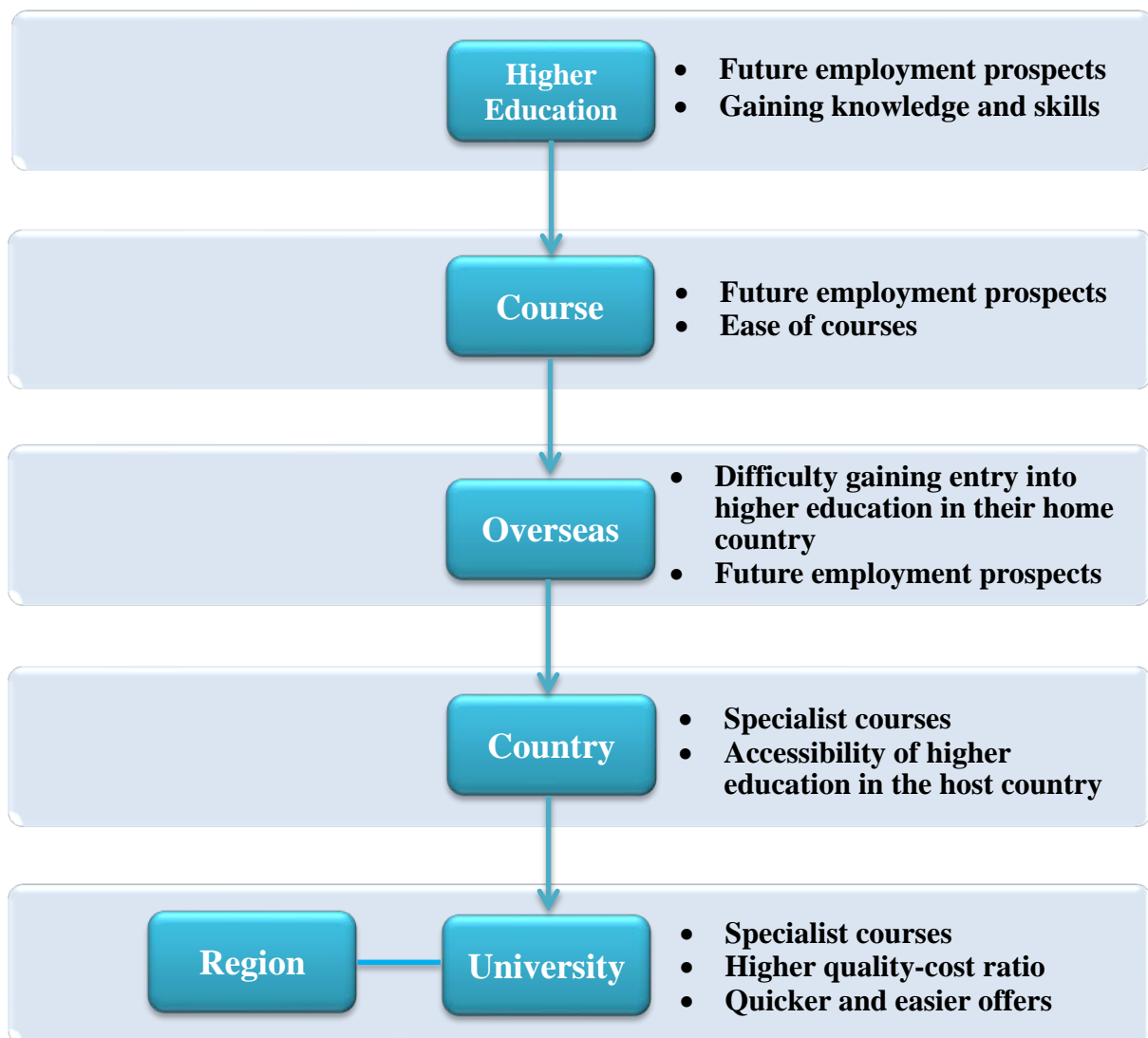


Figure 14.10. The career-oriented decision-making model for international students seeking overseas higher education.

14.3.2.3 Model three: The immigration-oriented decision-making model

The last is the immigration-oriented decision-making model, which represents the decision of the group primarily driven by a desire to immigrate by means of the education system. This group of international students intentionally took advantage of higher education to help achieve their immigration purposes. Their decision-making process can be seen in Figure 14.11.

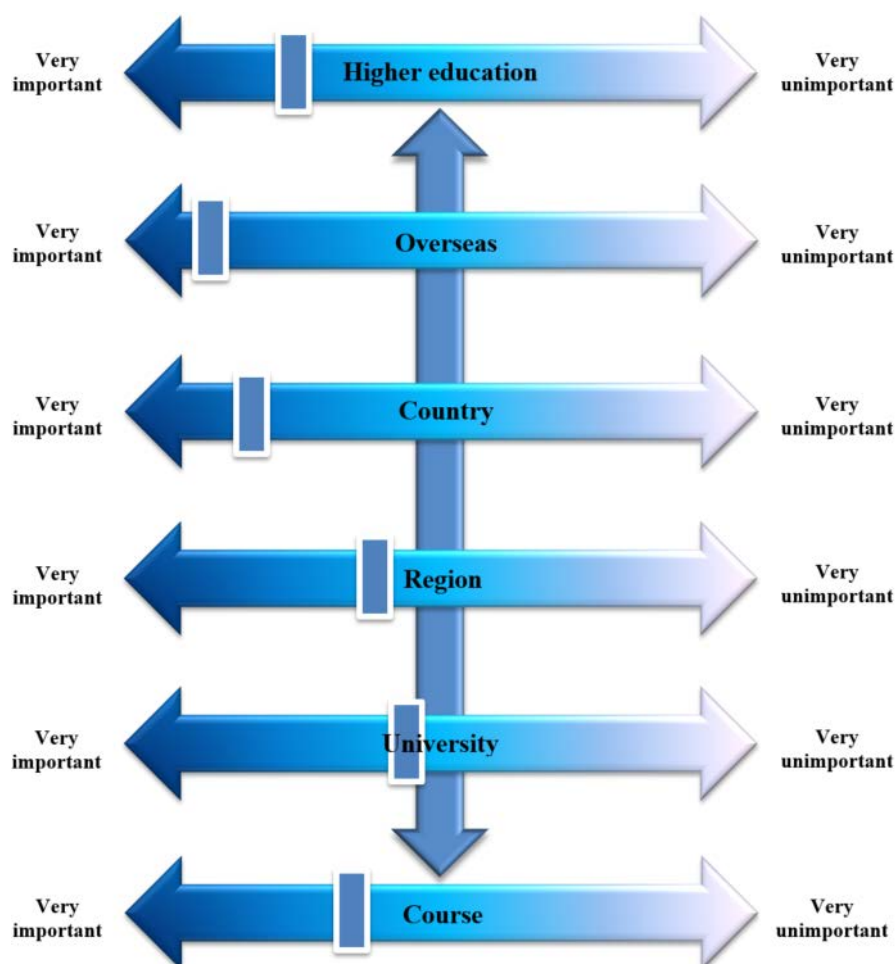


Figure 14.11. The immigration-oriented decision-making process for international students seeking overseas higher education.

The international students' immigration-oriented decision-making model of overseas education was developed from this decision-making process (see Figure 14.12). In this model the international students initially chose to travel overseas. Migration to another country was seen as a way to address their jobless reality. Also, immigration prospects were beneficial to them. After deciding to go overseas, they compared the immigration policies of various countries to find one with high possibilities. Social links in that country were also a potential lure. After deciding on the country of choice, the students began to explore approaches to immigrating there. Receiving higher education in the host country is always the easiest and most useful way. Their next decision was about their particular course. So-called immigration courses have

become very popular. Students transferring from another field were attracted by the ease of admission into these courses. They then selected a specific region in that country as a study destination. This was usually a region which could bring them regional immigration advantages, such as extra immigration points. Finally, a particular university was selected, based primarily on the immigration courses and the regional immigration advantages. A higher quality-cost ratio, and prompt offer only served to reinforce the choice for that university.

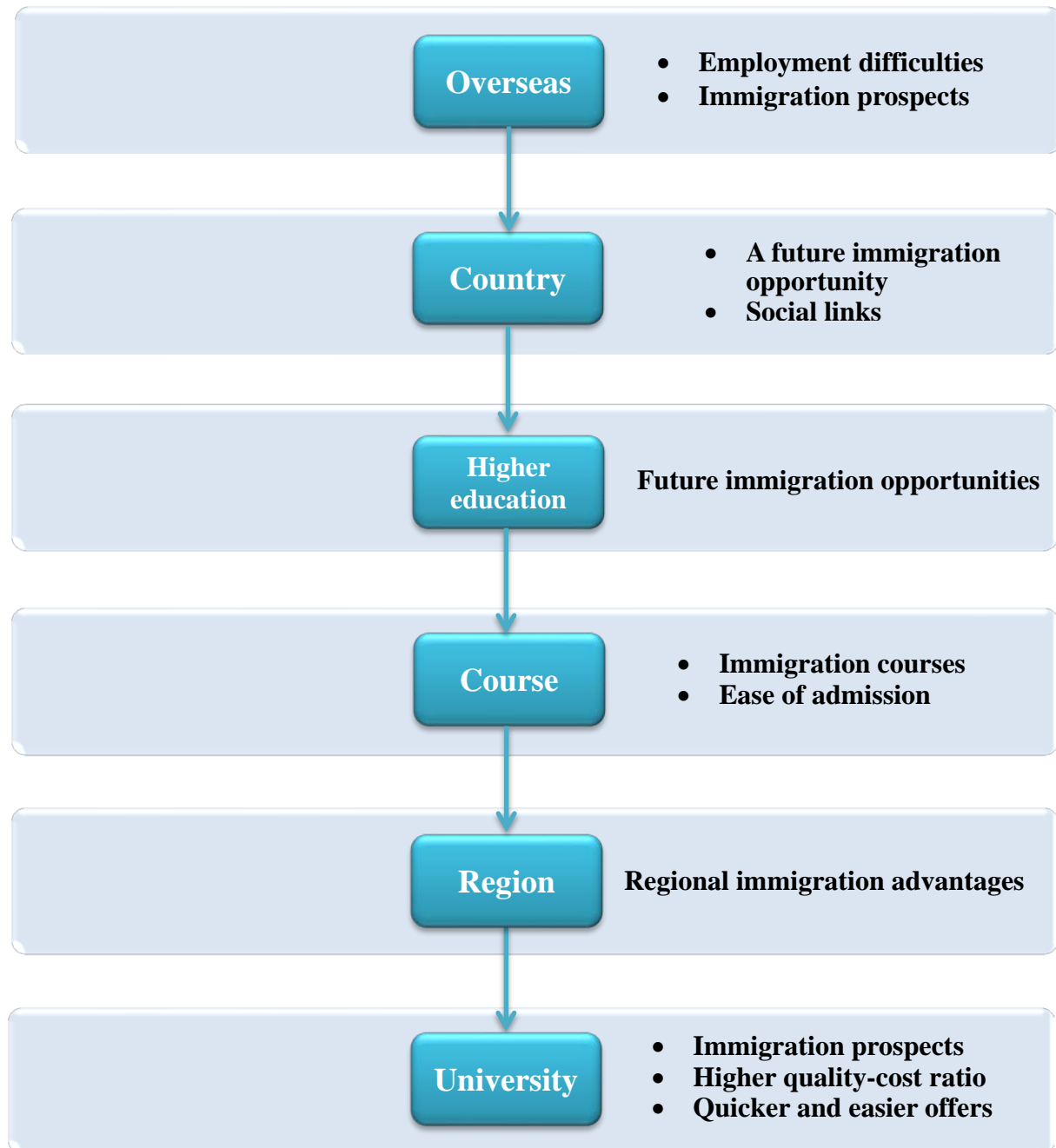


Figure 14.12. The immigration-oriented decision-making model for international students seeking overseas higher education.

14.4 Conclusion

This chapter has begun the process of concluding the thesis, with its summary of the conceptual contributions this research has made to new knowledge. The next chapter continue this process, discussing recommendations and implications for policy, practice and future research.

Chapter 15 Implications for Policy, Practice and Future Research

15.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the recommendations and implications arising from the research, at both the practical and conceptual levels. First, recommendations and implications will be posed for practice and policy. Inevitably there were approaches and scope for other research that could not be addressed in this study, and these will be discussed in the section on the implications for future research. Finally, this chapter will highlight and emphasise the theoretical and pragmatic significance of the research.

15.2 Recommendations and Implications for Practice and Policy

The theories developed in this research lead to a number of far-reaching recommendations for future practice and policy. This project started with the goal of exploring the decision making employed by Chinese international students who eventually chose to study in a regional Australian university. The scope of the project then expanded gradually to the broader context of how students make decisions about overseas higher education. Consequently, the recommendations are applicable globally, and not just limited to the particular stakeholders of the case study. In other words, the recommendations arising from this research not only focus on the case context of UTAS, Tasmania, regional Australia, and Australia in general, but are also applicable to a greater range of stakeholders in the international higher education industry, such as the higher education institutions and government bodies of major destination countries (like the U.S.A., the U.K.) (see Figure 1.1 in section 1.3.1) for international tertiary education in the world, as well as the cohort of international students and education agents.

The identified decision-making models in this study imply that international students had three distinct motivational orientations when making the decision to engage in higher education abroad: qualifications, career and immigration. The differences between these motivational orientations clearly divide the international student market in the world. Therefore, it is imperative that stakeholders of international higher education, especially higher education providers and governments, tailor their services to the diverse needs of these students by developing policies and targeting the various international student groups.

In addition, political events and government policies in the major destination countries can have a great impact on students' willingness to engage in international higher education, hence they are important factors to consider in relation to the international higher education market. Because of their importance, these more holistic aspects will also be discussed in this section.

15.2.1 Practical Recommendations Concerning the Three Types of International

Students

15.2.1.1 Practical recommendations concerning qualification-oriented international students

Higher education institutions should consider concentrating on the rankings of their institutions and programs. According to the results of this study, qualification-oriented international students are highly motivated by the university qualification itself when deciding to receive higher education overseas, and so this cohort puts much emphasis on the value of the potential qualification. The study participants indicated the belief that a high-ranking university offers a qualification with high value, and so they tried their best to enrol in the highest ranking universities that they could gain access to.

In this way, the research findings suggest that the world's top-ranking universities may continue to maintain their top-tier status, while higher education institutions with comparatively lower rankings may need to keep striving to improve their rankings. This research has shown that rankings of university programs or disciplines resonated also with prospective postgraduates. As well, students seeking to enrol in higher degrees were able to place even more importance on particular program rankings than on university rankings. In response to the needs of these international postgraduates, higher education institutions may choose to promote the rankings of their individual programs as well, particularly at the level of master's or doctoral education.

It is worth noting that the Chinese international student market may change over the next few decades as a result of the newly launched "Double World Class Project" for Chinese universities and disciplines (Atack, 2017). By 2050, the Chinese Government aims to have 42 top world-ranked universities and several world-class disciplines. This will undoubtedly transform the current situation in China, where currently fewer than five Chinese universities are in the list of top-100 universities in the world (Atack, 2017).

Chinese people universally attach great importance to university rankings, and this is even more, so the case with qualification-oriented Chinese international students. Along with the rise of Chinese universities and disciplines on the world stage, a larger number of the brightest Chinese students may choose to stay in China instead of going overseas for a quality higher education. It became very clear in this research that, for many Chinese international students, their first priority would have been to choose a Chinese university.

The trend for economic growth in China seems to suggest, however, that attending an overseas university will become a more affordable education option for more students in the future. Thus, the pattern of prospective Chinese international students could come to reflect these two options. That is, world-class local universities in China could successfully attract more high-quality Chinese students, while average Chinese students will become more likely to go overseas to engage in quality higher education.

Additionally, universities should consider establishing more joint education programs with other countries. The findings of this research indicate that joint education programs are a very useful approach for drawing Chinese students overseas. Due to the qualification orientation among them, the students in these programs stated that they paid more attention to the ranking of the Chinese partnership university than to that of the overseas higher education institution when applying for a program in China. Therefore, building cooperative relationships with prestigious universities in other countries could attract a larger number of international students into these joint education programs.

15.2.1.2 Practical recommendations concerning career-oriented international students

Universities should also consider developing or maintaining strong profiles for their own specialist disciplines and relevant courses, which would keep them competitive among overseas academic institutions, and effectively appeal to the specific group of international students interested in the fields they have to offer. This study revealed that a large number of career-oriented international students chose career-related specialist courses at overseas universities. Limited choices for specialist courses in their home country pushed them overseas to seek the qualifications they needed, and foreign countries and overseas universities offering these specialist courses drew their attention.

This study has shown that future employment was at the core of the decision making for all career-oriented international students; they associated all six choices pertaining to overseas study with that clear career purpose. Higher education providers could, therefore, consider providing clear information about career outcomes for their academic courses, both professional and non-professional. These clear career outcomes could help international students to match their aspired future careers with their fields of study. Career-oriented international students may not choose a course without having a clear knowledge of related career outcomes, regardless of whether it is a professional or a non-professional course. Without such guidance, it could be particularly difficult for students choosing non-professional courses to identify future career prospects.

15.2.1.3 Practical recommendations concerning immigration-oriented international students

There is also a need for the countries targeted for immigration purposes by international students to establish a clearer connection between international higher education and skilled permanent immigration. Taking the Australian case as an example, this study has revealed that immigration-oriented international students thoroughly researched Australian immigration policies before making their decision to study at a regional Australian university. They then employed strategies to circumvent particular disadvantageous immigration policies and achieve their immigration objectives.

For example, the first strategy used was to enrol in one of the courses thought of as immigration courses, without having any intention to work in that field in the future. The key reason they

chose it was merely as a vehicle for immigration rather than interest in the subject itself. Although this strategy was not illegitimate, it seems to be obviously against the original intention of Australian skilled migration policies.

The Australian Government could, therefore, consider expanding the Skilled Occupation List and offering a wider diversity of immigration course options to immigration-oriented international students. This would result in more of the international students who desire to immigrate to Australia being able to courses in fields that they can actually pursue as a career after moving here. The Australian Government could also introduce a requirement that international graduates from Australian universities be bound to work in the area of their study for a period of time after a PR visa is granted.

The regional immigration advantages in Tasmania, although rated highly by the Chinese international students as a reason to choose to study in regional Australia, were nevertheless overshadowed by their strong intentions to migrate to metropolitan Australian areas. The findings here have indicated that many Chinese international graduates have moved to big Australian cities after gaining the Skilled Nominated visa from Tasmania by breaking the agreement from the Tasmanian Government to live in Tasmania for two years after they are granted the visa. The lack of job opportunities and a strong desire to live in metropolises were the major reasons for this.

More rigorous policies at the Tasmanian state level could be implemented to curb the outflow of migrants to other Australian states. More importantly, the Tasmanian Government could develop stronger economic incentives, and provide more employment opportunities for graduates, which could increase the length of stay of Chinese international students in Tasmania after graduation.

15.2.1.4 Practical recommendations concerning all three types of international students

This study has given rise to a number of suggestions for practice and policies, for all three types of international students.

All three types of international students in this research highlighted the fact that low entry requirements played a decisive role in their decision to receive higher education at a regional Australian university. For this reason, ease of admission could be prioritised even more. In particular, the comparatively lower English language requirements attract non-native English speakers, especially Asian international students.

Courses that do not require prerequisite education in the chosen field were also very enticing for international students intending to transfer to other fields. The acceptance of transfer credits appealed to these international students as well, since they admitted they would only pick a university and a course which accepted previous credits.

Ease of admission was another successful and effective strategy that helped Australia compete

with other popular English-speaking countries, like the U.S.A. This research discovered that regional Australian universities could be highly competitive compared even with metropolitan Australian universities due to this very factor. It could be worthwhile therefore, for other countries and metropolitan Australian universities to adopt this strategy as well.

Universities could also choose to focus more attention on developing or maintaining high quality-cost ratios of total costs for international students. A high quality-cost ratio, including affordability and good education quality, was considered to be one of the most significant attractions for international students when deciding to enrol in a particular university or in a particular course. Competitive tuition fees and the availability of scholarships were key drivers for self-financed international students when choosing to undertake a course at UTAS.

The tuition fees for UTAS have been raised since this investigation was undertaken, which was noted by the interview participants. UTAS could attempt to maintain competitive tuition fees if competitiveness is a goal. Also, in order to entice more international students, UTAS could keep offering competitive scholarships, such as the 25% discount of tuition fees scholarship for coursework students, and tuition fee waivers as well as living allowances for research students.

Apart from affordability, the students' decisions were affected by the university's reputation. All three types of international students emphasised the value and quality of Australian higher education. From Chapters 7 to 11, it was seen that Chinese international students sought information on the quality of an overseas higher education from a wide range of sources, mainly encompassing family, friends, alumni, education agents, and online searches.

Universities should, therefore, strive to ensure positive experiences for international students so as to guarantee good word-of-mouth referrals. This can lead to former students recommending their alma mater to prospective students from their countries.

Universities should also consider strengthening their cooperation with education agencies. This study has identified parents as the major decision-makers, or at least significant influencers for students. Due to the language barrier and a lack of overseas experience or international links, they usually take their children to education agencies to obtain suggestions about overseas study. The interviewees reflected that the recommendations made by education agents strongly influenced their study destination choices.

On the other hand, the efforts of frontline international student recruiters and marketing teams in higher education institutions should be expanded to engage more actively with online platforms of international students, such as on online forums in their mother languages. Many interview participants stated that their selection of a regional Australian university was influenced heavily by the information provided on Taschinese, an online forum.

A quick placement also offers another key for a large number of international student enrolments. Intriguingly, this research found that Chinese international students would accept

the quickest offers given to them rather than waiting for offers from even higher ranking institutions. This could be made a strategic priority in international student recruitment.

15.2.2 Policy Implications for Major Destination Countries of International Higher Education

Drawn from the previous 14 chapters in this study, this section will discuss the policy implication for major destination countries of international higher education. Three major countries are focused on here, that is, the U.S.A., the U.K. and Australia. The following are three reasons to discuss these three countries rather than others.

First and foremost, as discussed in section 1.3.1 of the introduction chapter, the U.S.A., the U.K., and Australia were the world's three largest destination countries for international tertiary students, which accounted for 35% of total students in overseas higher education (OECD, 2017). These three countries are the most representative to reflect the development situation of the entire market of international higher education.

In addition, an intriguing phenomenon is that in terms of international education engagement, a negative impact in one country can lead to a positive impact in another, and that the U.S.A., the U.K. and Australia have never all experienced growth at the same time (Llieva, 2017). Thus, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the impact of policies on international students' selections of these three destination countries so as to estimate the future market share of international higher education for each of these countries. This could potentially help to further forecast the trends in the future global market of international higher education.

Second, the majority of the existing literature in relation to international students' decision making focuses on these three countries, which could be seen in the literature review chapter (Chapter 3) and results and discussion chapters (Chapters 6-12). This shows the necessity and importance on the discussion of implications for international students' selections of these three destination countries in this research.

Third, Chinese international students in this research have revealed that in terms of destination countries of international higher education, the U.S.A., the U.K. and Australia were the three main options for them (see Chapters 6-12). This study also found some of Australia's key advantages over the other two of these countries in the global market, such as accessibility of the country, accessibility of its higher education, knowledge about Australian higher education, social links and environmental considerations. This could mainly be seen in Chapter 8. By integrating and comparing those factors leading Chinese international students to choose Australia as their study destination rather than the U.S.A. and the U.K., the analysis results provide these three countries with a guide of the potential future development direction of the international higher education policies.

15.2.2.1 The U.S.A.

American higher education institutions have been affected adversely by two major issues recently, that is, the beginning of the Trump administration and safety concerns about the U.S.A. as a country. Trump's election was perceived by many as a precursor to the U.S.A. becoming less welcoming to international students. This led to a 15% drop of inbound international students (Connelly, 2017). Obviously, Trump's travel ban policy seriously dampened the enthusiasm of international students from Muslim countries. As well, Trump administration policies on immigration may affect immigration-oriented Chinese international student engagement in American international higher education, although this will not actively block the majority of Chinese students from attending American universities.

The first round of data collection for this research was conducted before the Trump election and revealed that Chinese international students did not perceive any connection between American higher education and future immigration prospects (see section 8.3.1). Seen from the immigration-oriented decision-making model derived in this research (see section 13.3.3.1), immigration-oriented Chinese international students did not constitute the majority of students engaging in American international higher education. Rather, American universities attract a large number of qualification-oriented and career-oriented Chinese international students (see the qualification-oriented decision-making models in section 14.3.2.1 and the career-oriented decision-making model in section 14.3.2.2). For these two types of students, the advantages that stem from the high value placed on American university qualifications (see (2) Case: Interviewee 21 for the qualification-oriented decision-making model (for joint education programs) in section 13.3.1.1) and future employment prospects that stem from that are not affected by the Trump administration. If international students in China, the top source country for international enrolments globally and in America (DET, 2017i) still desire to study in the U.S.A., the "Trump effect" on American international higher education will be negligible.

Conversely, the participants in this study indicated that the rising tide of safety issues in the U.S.A. influenced their decision not to choose to study there (see section 8.7.2 and (2) Case: Interviewee 8 for the qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs) in section 13.3.1.2). In this study gun-safety was identified as one of the factors considered by the students and their parents in choosing Australia instead of the U.S.A (see section 8.7.2 and (2) Case: Interviewee 8 for the qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs) in section 13.3.1.2). If gun safety issues continue in the U.S.A., it could lead to a situation where prospective Chinese students come to prefer one of the other two major destination countries, the U.K. or Australia which are comparatively safer.

15.2.2.2 The U.K.

Brexit has been the biggest political event in the U.K. affecting international higher education engagement. Brexit had a negative affect on international student enrolments from the European Union (EU). The Hobson survey (Dennis, 2016) showed that the U.K. became less attractive as a study destination for the majority of EU students (82%) because of it. Brexit has also deterred non-EU international students because it sends a signal that the U.K. is no longer

as welcoming to outsiders as before. These international students from EU or non-EU nations may consider study in the other two major destinations because of this.

In this study, however, the Chinese international students did not cite Brexit as a reason for choosing to study in Australia and not the U.K. Rather, they said that the reasons they chose Australia instead of the U.K. included the latter's strict post-study immigration laws (see section 8.3.1), expensive tuition fees (see section 8.4.2), and the fact that some U.K. qualifications are without full recognition in China (see section 8.5.1).

15.2.2.3 Australia

Compared to the U.S.A. and the U.K., the political situation in Australia is stable, and therefore the growth of international student numbers to Australia is much faster than in the other two major study destinations (Llieva, 2017). The policies for Australian visas (see section 8.3.2) and immigration (see section 8.3.1, the immigration-oriented decision-making model in section 13.3.3.1 and Case: Interviewee 6 for the immigration-oriented decision-making model in section 13.3.3.2), however, which were discovered by this study to be the chief concern of many students, are modified quite frequently.

Recent policy changes which have impacted on international student engagement include the full implementation of the Knight Review in 2012, and the introduction of a new student visa framework in 2016. The Knight Review (Knight, 2011) recommended the implementation of streamlined processing for student visas as well as post study work rights. Interviewees in this study remarked that the quick and easy student visa application process was a major incentive for them to choose Australia instead of another international student-receiving country (see section 8.3.2). They compared this process to the difficulty in applying for a student visa in places such as the U.S.A (see section 8.3.2). More importantly, the simplified student visa framework came into effect in July, 2016 (DIBP, 2016), which led to the application process for an Australian student visa becoming much simpler and faster. This policy will further motivate international students to select Australia as their overseas higher education destination.

The other key issue of the Knight Review (Knight, 2011) concerned the Post-Study Work visa, but this was not mentioned by any students in this research as their motivation for studying in Australia. They focused instead on possibilities for PR after graduation (see section 8.3.1, section 9.5, section 10.5, section 11.3, the immigration-oriented decision-making model in section 13.3.3.1 and Case: Interviewee 6 for the immigration-oriented decision-making model in section 13.3.3.2), which allows them to work and live permanently in Australia. This may be because when the cohort in this research applied for overseas higher education, the policy for Post-Study Work visas had just begun to be implemented, and so this group of Chinese international students was not aware of it.

In the future, we can predict that immigration opportunities will still be of the highest priority for many international students. If some of them struggle to apply for Australian PR after graduation, the alternative option for them will be the Post-Study Work visa. This visa will

have more impact on career-oriented international students (see the career-oriented decision-making model in section 13.3.2.1) since future employment prospects are one of the most important motivators for them when making the decision to study overseas. Possibly, qualification-oriented international students (see the qualification-oriented decision-making models in section 13.3.1) will also be attracted by any post-study work rights.

In the competition with major international student destination countries, Australia may encourage PGR students (see the qualification-oriented decision-making model (for non-joint education programs) in section 13.3.1.2) by offering them Post-Study Work visas that are valid for a longer period than the duration of the Post-Study Work visa in the U.S.A. and other big host countries (Llieva, 2017).

15.3 Implications for Future Research

This research has suggested many implications that need to be investigated in future research.

First of all, the data collected in this research were *ex post facto*. A lack of control over extraneous variables is a shortcoming of *ex post facto* research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). That is, the participants who were studying at UTAS recollected what motivated them to select this regional university before coming to Australia, so their pre-departure motivations could have been distorted in their memories, and influenced by their Australian university experiences. To minimise the likelihood of this, the reminder that the study was concerned with the students' motivations before they came to UTAS was underlined in the questionnaire instructions. It was also emphasised repeatedly in the interviews, in attempts to avoid or minimise the responses being influenced by UTAS experiences that followed. Future research could attempt to collect data from international students about their decision making prior to, or immediately upon, their arrival to their overseas study destination country.

Second, only a small number of interviewees were able to check their quotations in this thesis. A bilingual colleague assisted to check the rest of quotations to ensure their quality. For future study, an advance announcement about the importance of members checking their own quotations could possibly enhance the response rate. Apart from that, for future research, when a researcher takes the role of translator, data presented in thesis will be more trustworthy if a sample transcript and translation are provided to a certified translator to verify the accuracy.

Third, one of the outcomes of this research was the construction of a choice-strength framework. Student decision-making models were then formulated, building upon this framework. These models were highly structured, and provided an interpretive and analytical lens for understanding the relevant issues. Future research could be directed at applying these decision-making models further to address the full complexity of the data and focus in more detail on the three elements in the models: choices, process and influencing factors. A forward step in the future could also be to confirm the multi-step process for each type of decision-making model, and identify more comprehensive factors that influence international students' decision

making. Future research could probe why international students do not choose a particular region or country due to perceived disadvantages that these locations have for them. In addition, it is suggested that more complex quantitative data analysis techniques, particularly Structural Equation Modelling, could be adopted to examine the interplay among choices, factors and process in the models, and test the goodness-of-fit of the models.

Moreover, this research is an example of the application of overseas higher education decision-making models for international students. It provides valuable understanding to interpret these decision-making models. However, this case was limited to the context of Chinese international students and a regional Australian university. It would be useful to conduct studies on a wider range of situations, including diverse overseas higher education locations and involving international students from a variety of countries. This could test the external validity of the decision-making models formulated here.

Researchers and academics could also explore how international students make decisions to receive higher education in other Australian universities. Additional research may be conducted in other major destination countries or popular international student-receiving countries, to see whether the decision-making models of this research can be repeated in other contexts. The samples drawn from this research could be extended to international students from other Asian countries, the largest regional source of international students in higher education (DET, 2017i).

Finally, in the future, by investigating international students from diverse countries, particularly from the other top five source countries of internationally mobile students, India, Germany, Korea, France and Saudi Arabia (DET, 2017i), these proposed decision-making models can be interpreted more comprehensively.

15.4 The Significance of the Study

This research has made original and substantial contributions in the form of new and in-depth knowledge about international higher education and international student mobility. Also, this work provides additional evidence with respect to cross-cultural studies of higher education, and the marketing of higher education.

To be more specific, the findings from this research add to the pool of knowledge and understanding of how students make decisions about overseas higher education, in both theoretical and practical senses. It informs and stimulates further exploration of cultural and intercultural influences on international students' decision making when considering study abroad.

At the theoretical level, this study has made several noteworthy contributions to the theory of decision making and the understanding of international students. First of all, it has identified clearly that choices, factors and processes are the three main constructs when international

students make decisions to receive overseas higher education. The interactions of these constructs compose international students' decision-making models. Second, the research has contributed a comprehensive presentation of the factors influencing international students to undertake overseas higher education based on six choices. International student decision-making processes were identified on the basis of the choice-strength framework proposed in this research. Three international student decision-making models were constructed through the systematic integration of choices, factors and processes, which were visualised in simplified diagrams. Third, this research examined, probably for the first time, the motivations and decision making of Chinese international students who chose to undertake regional Australian higher education. Fourth, in order to follow the induction-dominated nature underpinned by systematic grounded theory, an unconventional structure was adopted creatively, this being the most appropriate for reporting a mixed methods study and presenting its built theories.

At the practical level, this study could potentially be useful to help a wide range of stakeholders of international higher education and research users in the international higher education-related industry (such as frontline international student recruiters, international marketing managers, international education agents, international higher education providers and government policy makers) to develop a better understanding of the international higher education market.

This is the end of this research, but the start of more exciting exploration in this field.

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Appendix 1: Justifications for Sources of Factors in the Questionnaire

Choice	Factor	Justification for Source
Higher Education	Gaining knowledge	Identified in: (1) Literature (Bamber, 2014; Ho, 1986; Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Kember, 2016; Matsui, 1995); (2) Personal experience; (3) Conversations with Chinese international students
	Future employment prospects	Identified in: (1) literature (Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Kember, 2016); (2) Personal experience; (3) Conversations with Chinese international students
	Improving the quality of life	Identified in literature (Bai, 2006; Li & Bray, 2007)
	Broadening horizons	Identified in literature (Hobsons EMEA, 2016; Kember, 2016)
	Self-actualisation	Identified in literature (Kember, 2016; Lee, 1996; Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Louie, 2005; Tu, 1985; Watkins & Biggs, 2001)
	Chinese tradition	Identified in: (1) Literature (Kember, 2016); (2) Personal experience
	Pressure from parents/teachers/friends	Identified in literature (Chung et al., 2009; Kember, 2016; Willis & Kennedy, 2004)
Overseas	Higher quality education compared with China	Identified in: (1) Literature (Bamber, 2014; Bodycott, 2009; Griner & Sobol, 2014; Li & Bray, 2007; Liu, 2015; Liu et al., 2014; Yang, 2007); (2) Personal experience; (3) Conversations with Chinese international students
	Difficulty gaining entry into Chinese higher education	Identified in literature (Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007; Li, Whalley, & Xing, 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Sánchez et al., 2006; Stafford, 2010; Yang, 2007; Yao, 2004)
	Improving English	Identified in: (1) Literature (Bamber, 2014; Bodycott, 2009;

Choice	Factor	Justification for Source
		Li & Bray, 2007; Liu, 2015; Liu, Elston, & Zhou, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007); (2) Personal experience; (3) Conversations with Chinese international students
	Learning to be independent	Identified in literature (Yang, 2007)
	Seeking freedom	Identified in literature (Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006)
	Gaining international/intercultural experience	Identified in literature (Chang, 2015; Griner & Sobol, 2014; Hobsons APAC, 2015; Liu et al., 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006)
	Following the trend to study overseas	Identified in literature (Griner & Sobol, 2014; Liu, 2015; Liu et al., 2014)
	Raising status	Identified in literature (Griner & Sobol, 2014; Hu, 1944; Li & Bray, 2007; Sánchez et al., 2006)
Australia	Easy to know about Australia or Australian higher education in China	Identified in: (1) Literature (Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002); (2) Conversations with Chinese international students
	Good reputation for higher education in the world	Identified in literature (Azmat et al., 2013; DET, 2017c; Choi & Nieminen, 2013; Fam & Gray, 2000; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Hui, 2005; Hobsons APAC, 2015; Hobsons Solutions, 2016; i-graduate, 2014; Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pacey, 2014; Yang, 2007)
	An English-speaking country	Identified in: (1) Literature (Bodycott, 2009; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Griner & Sobol, 2014; Liu, 2015; Yang, 2007); (2) Personal experience; (3) Conversations with Chinese international students
	Future immigration opportunity	Identified in: (1) Literature (Azmat et al., 2013; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Liu, 2015; Liu et al., 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pacey, 2014; Yang, 2007); (2) Conversations with Chinese international students

Choice	Factor	Justification for Source
	Environmental considerations like climate, lifestyle	Identified in: (1) Literature (Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002); (2) Conversations with Chinese international students
	Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	Identified in literature (Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Prugsamatz, Pentecost, & Ofstad, 2006; Yang, 2007)
	Family/relatives/friends are living/studying in Australia	Identified in literature (Azmat et al., 2013; Bodycott, 2009; Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007)
	A good place to travel	Identified in literature (Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002)
	Quick and easy student visa application process	Identified in literature (Gong & Huybers, 2015; Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007)
	Safety and low racial discrimination	Identified in literature (Bamber, 2014; DET, 2017c; Gong & Huybers, 2015; i-graduate, 2014; Liu, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Yang, 2007)
Tasmania	Good study environment	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Personal experience; (3) Literature (Abubakar, Shanka, & Muuka, 2010; Jenkins, 2007; Shanka et al., 2006; Tan, 2012)
	Natural environment	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Personal experience; (3) Literature (Studies in Australia, 2017; Study Tasmania, 2017)
	Low living expenses	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Personal experience; (3) Literature (Hobsons EMEA, 2016; Pimpa, 2002; Shanka, Quintal, & Taylor, 2006; Student Cities Australia, 2017)
	Easier to immigrate to compared with other Australian states	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Department of State Growth, 2015; Tan, 2012)

Choice	Factor	Justification for Source
	Safety	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (DET, 2015; Hobsons EMEA, 2016)
	No large Chinese community	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Personal experience; (3) Literature (Tan, 2012)
	Relaxing lifestyle	Identified in conversations with Chinese international students
	A good place to travel	Identified in conversations with Chinese international students
UTAS	University reputation/ranking	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Personal experience; (3) Literature (Gong & Huybers, 2015; Jenkins, 2007; Lu et al., 2009; Su & Harrison, 2016)
	Low tuition costs	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Bohman, 2009; i-graduate, 2014; Jenkins, 2007)
	Availability of scholarships	Identified in: (1) Personal experience; (2) Conversations with Chinese international students; (3) Literature (Andressen, 1991; Daily, Farewell, & Kumar, 2010; i-graduate, 2014; Jenkins, 2007; Li & Bray, 2007; Lu et al., 2009)
	Accepting transfer credits	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Jenkins, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002)
	Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	Identified in: (1) Personal experience; (2) Conversations with Chinese international students; (3) Literature (Duan, 1997; i-graduate, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002;

Choice	Factor	Justification for Source
		Shanka et al., 2006)
	The qualification is recognised in China	Identified in conversations with Chinese international students
	Easier/faster to get an offer of enrolment compared to other Australian universities	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Lee, 2013; Li & Bray, 2007; Hobsons Solutions, 2016)
Course	My previous university has this joint education program with UTAS	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Fang & Wang, 2014)
	Course reputation	Identified in: (1) Personal experience; (2) Conversations with Chinese international students; (3) Literature (Chen, 2007b; Fang & Wang, 2014)
	High employment rate of graduates from this course	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Manns & Swift, 2016)
	Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Kember, 2016; Lord & Dawson, 2002; Pimpa, 2002)
	Easy to graduate from	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Pimpa, 2002; Wu, 2014)
	Future immigration opportunity	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Ekanayake & Jackling, 2014; Jackling, 2007)
	Promotion from a previous/current job	Identified in: (1) Conversations with Chinese international students; (2) Literature (Pimpa, 2002; Wu, 2014)
	Personal interest	Identified in: (1) Personal experience; (2) Conversations with Chinese international students;

Choice	Factor	Justification for Source
		(3) Literature (Hobsons Solutions, 2016; Wu, 2014)

Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire in Phase 1

How Do Students Make Decisions About Overseas Higher Education? A Case Study of Chinese International Students at a Regional Australian University

Survey

This survey is to explore the reasons why you chose to study at the University of Tasmania (UTAS).

Instructions: All factors you are going to choose are *original factors* you had *before you came to Australia* rather than your *current factors*.

Part A: Basic information

1. Gender

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Year of birth

3. Which province/SAR/city/town do you come from?

Province/SAR -----

City/Town -----

4. Faculty

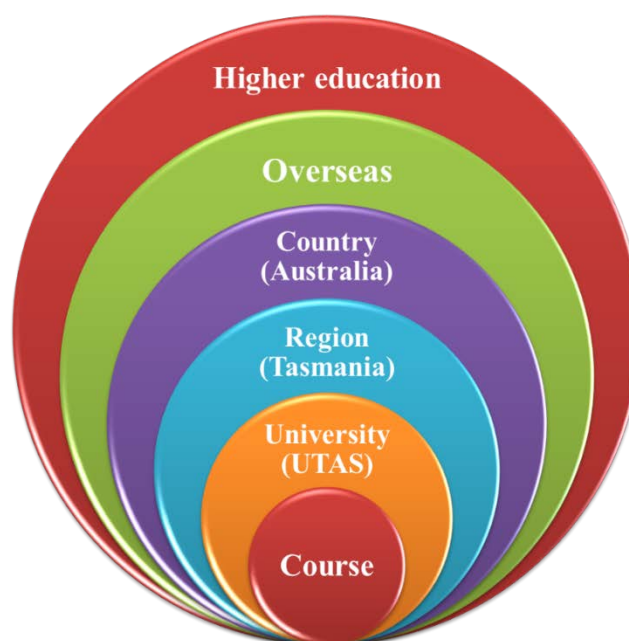
- ☐ Australian Maritime College
- ☐ Arts
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Health
- ☐ Law
- ☐ Science, Engineering & Technology

- ☐ Tasmanian School of Business & Economics
- ☐ Other faculty (s) or institute(s) (please specify) _____

5. Which degree are you undertaking at UTAS?

- ☐ Bachelor
- ☐ Master
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ Other(s) (please specify) _____

Part B: Chinese international students' decision making for selecting a regional Australian university



Instructions:

The above figure is a decision-making model with **six choices** (higher education, overseas, country (Australia), region (Tasmania), university (UTAS), course) you made in selecting to study at UTAS. The following questions ask how important these factors were to influence these choices you made before you came to Australia.

Remember: All factors you are going to choose are **original factors** you had **before you came to Australia** rather than your **current factors**.

6. The factors why you chose to progress to *higher education*.

Factor	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Never considered
Gaining knowledge	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Future employment prospects	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Improving the quality of life	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Broadening horizons	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Self-actualisation	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Chinese tradition	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Pressure from parents/teachers/friends	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Other factor(s) (please specify) _____

7. The factors why you chose to study *Overseas*.

Factor	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Never considered
Higher quality education compared with China	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Difficulty gaining entry into Chinese higher education	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Improving English	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Learning to be independent	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Seeking freedom	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Gaining international/intercultural experience	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Following the trend to study overseas	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Raising status	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Other factor(s) (please specify) _____

8. The reasons why you picked *Australia* as your study destination.

Factor	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Never considered
Easy to know about Australia or Australian higher education in China	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Good reputation for higher education in the world	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
An English-speaking country	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Future immigration opportunity	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Environmental considerations like climate, lifestyle	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Family/relatives/friends are living/studying in Australia	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
A good place to travel	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Quick and easy student visa application process	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Safety and low racial discrimination	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Other factor(s) (please specify) _____

9. The reasons why you came to *Tasmania* for study.

Factor	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Never considered
Good study environment	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Natural environment	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Low living expenses	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Easier to immigrate to compared with other Australian states	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No large Chinese community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relaxing lifestyle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A good place to travel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other factor(s) (please specify) _____

10. The reasons why you selected to study at *UTAS*.

Factor	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Never considered
University reputation/ranking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low tuition costs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of scholarships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accepting transfer credits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The qualification is recognised in China	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Easier/faster to get an offer of enrolment compared to other Australian universities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other factor(s) (please specify) _____

11. The reasons why you chose to study your current *COURSE*.

Factor	Very important	Important	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Never considered
My previous university has this joint education program with UTAS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course reputation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

High employment rate of graduates from this course	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Parents/relatives/an education agent/friends recommended it	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Easy to graduate from	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Future immigration opportunity	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Promotion from a previous/current job	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Personal interest	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Other factor(s) (please specify) _____

Thank you very much for your participation and support!

Appendix 3: Interview Schedules in Phase 1

Interview Schedule in Phase 1

1. Tell me about yourself (age, hometown, campus, faculty/school, degree, course, expected graduation time, education history, etc.).
2. Why would you intend to go on to higher education instead of working?
3. What reason/reasons stimulated you to seek to study abroad rather than in one of the higher education institutions in China?
4. Why did you decide to pick Australia as your overseas study destination rather than another overseas country?
5. Why would you come to Tasmania, a regional state, instead of going to one of the metropolises, like Melbourne or Sydney?
6. Why would you choose UTAS rather than enrol in one of the Australian mainland universities?
7. Why did you select the current academic course instead of another program at UTAS?
8. What was your decision-making process about overseas higher education?

Interview Schedule in Phase 1 (Chinese Translation)

1. 自我介绍（年龄、家乡、校区、学系/学院、学位、课程、预计毕业时间、教育背景等等）。
2. 您为何有意接受高等教育而非选择就业？
3. 是什么原因激励您去寻求海外高等教育而非选择就读于一所中国的大学？
4. 您为何选择澳大利亚而非另一个海外国家作为您的海外留学目的地？
5. 您为何选择来到一个偏远的州就读，塔斯马尼亚，而非去一个大都市，比如墨尔本或者悉尼？
6. 您为何选择塔斯马尼亚大学而不是一所澳大利亚本岛的大学？
7. 您为何选择目前的课程而非另一个塔斯马尼亚大学的课程？
8. 您做海外高等教育这个决定的过程是怎样的？

Appendix 4: Interview Schedules in Phase 2

Interview Schedule in Phase 2

1. What are you doing now? Where are you?
2. Is this what you wanted to be doing?
3. Is what you are doing relevant to your course at UTAS?
4. Have you obtained Australian PR?
5. How worthwhile was it to be educated at UTAS, a regional Australian university?
6. To what extent were the expectations you had before coming to UTAS met?
7. Do you think that you made the right choices (six choices)?

Interview Schedule in Phase 2 (Chinese Translation)

1. 您近期正在忙什么？您人在哪里？
2. 您近期正在做您想做的事情吗？
3. 您近期做的事情是和您在塔斯马尼亚大学学习的课程有关联的吗？
4. 您是否已经获得了澳大利亚永久居住权？
5. 您觉得在一所澳大利亚偏远地区大学，塔斯马尼亚大学就读是否有价值？
6. 您在来塔斯马尼亚大学之前对于这段留学经历的期待有多少已经实现了？
7. 您认为您选择到塔斯马尼亚大学来就读是一个正确的决定吗？您之前有关塔斯马尼亚大学就读的六个选择是正确的吗？